

THE GUARDED WAY

SILAS K. HOCKING

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BY

SILAS K. HOCKING

AUTHOR OF

"WHERE THE ROADS CROSS," "THE LOST LODGE,"
ETC.



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THE GUARDED WAY

CHAPTER I

SIR JOHN TRESIZE STATES HIS TERMS

DANIEL TEAGUE, solicitor, sat hunched up in his swivel chair, his eyes on the table, his fingers drumming nervously on his blotting-pad.

Opposite him stood a young man in riding kit, his hat tilted at the back of his head, his freckled face flaming with anger.

For several moments there had been silence in the room—a silence strained and tense.

“ You know, of course, what it means ? ” the young man said at length, bringing out the words slowly and with a vindictive intonation.

The lawyer raised his eyes for a moment and regarded his visitor appraisingly.

“ I am in your hands,” he answered quietly, and with obvious effort. Then he dropped his eyes again.

“ I am glad you recognise that,” was the swift reply, “ for by Heaven——” He lashed viciously at his leggings with his riding-crop and left the sentence unfinished.

The lawyer straightened himself in his chair and raised a haggard face. “ I know when I am cornered,” he replied quietly, a bitter smile twisting his thin lips.

“ Then you admit that you have no defence ? ”

“ I have no defence that would avail me in a court of law, but you must be aware, Sir John, that I never meant to defraud you.”

The young baronet turned on him savagely. “ What’s the use of canting about what you meant to do or didn’t mean to do ? ” he scorned ; “ the fact remains that you have defrauded me.”

“ No, no.” And the older man raised both hands as if to ward off a blow. “ I admit that I made improper use of the money, but there was no thought to defraud. I have paid you interest every quarter, and, given time, you would have got all your money back.”

“ How ? In what way ? ” the other demanded, raising his voice almost to a shout. “ You admit that you have spent the money—gambled it away, I presume. Did you expect to swindle somebody else in order to pay me back ? ”

A streak of colour flashed up into the lawyer’s cheeks and his eyes hardened. “ For one whose own conduct is not exactly above suspicion,” he replied bitingly, “ ‘ swindle ’ is an unpleasant word.”

The young baronet’s face flushed hotly and he raised his riding-crop as though he meant to strike, then let it fall slowly to his side. “ Anyhow,” he said, in less violent tones, “ I have never downed a friend, never cheated a man who trusted me.”

“ You have never been in a corner from which you could see no way out,” the other replied, in a voice that trembled in spite of every effort to keep it steady. “ We are all honest until we are tempted. I always meant to play you fair. You ought to know me well enough to believe that. I was desperate and seized a desperate chance. My luck has been against me, and

you have caught me out. There is nothing more to be said. If you choose to prosecute, that is the end as far as I am concerned."

Sir John Tresize walked to the window and stood for several moments looking down into the street. His big shoulders were hunched almost to his ears, and he breathed heavily. The lawyer appeared to take no further notice of him. He had dropped his eyes once more to the writing-table, and his fingers drummed nervously on his blotting-pad.

The silence was broken by the younger man. "Do you expect me to do nothing?" he said, coming back from the window. "Cut my loss without a squeal? What about compounding a felony? As a lawyer you ought to know what that means."

"I am not suggesting anything," was the quiet answer.

"But you would like me to let you off?"

"It might be to your advantage."

"Eh? You think I have something to gain by letting a hound like you go free?"

"You have nothing to gain by prosecuting me."

"I should have the satisfaction of seeing you punished as you deserve."

"And of seeing other people suffer with me."

The baronet hunched his shoulders again. For a while nothing more was said. The lawyer went on tapping his blotting-pad with the tips of his fingers. Sir John frowned and toyed with his riding-crop. Through the slightly-open window drifted in a medley of sounds from the street outside. The rattle of carts and drays, the cracking of whips, the cries of street hawkers, the laughter of children, the barking of a dog. To Daniel Teague these sounds were so familiar that

they affected him no more than the ticking of a clock. He was not conscious of them now. He was wondering vaguely what Sir John would do. Wondering what would happen to Phyllis in case——

“I’m bound to say,” said the baronet, abruptly breaking the silence, “that, considering the seriousness of your offence, the peril in which you stand, you are taking the matter mighty coolly. Do you realise that I could ruin you with a word?”

“I quite realise it,” was the reply, his fingers still drumming on the blotting-pad.

“And you don’t ask me to stay my hand?”

“Why should I? I am not in the habit of asking favours. Besides, I know you well enough to be quite sure that you will consider your own interests, not mine.”

“And you think I should not be serving my own interests by sending you to prison?”

“That depends on what you consider your interests. If you are thinking only of the money——”

“Which I am not,” the other snapped.

“Of my niece, perhaps?”

“So you have guessed, eh?”

“It certainly has occurred to me, as well as to many others, that you have what I may call leanings in that direction . . . ”

For a moment or two Sir John hesitated, then he took off his hat and laid it on the window-ledge, placing his riding-crop by its side. Then, drawing up a chair to the end of the writing-table, he sat down and faced the lawyer.

“We have got to talk this thing out,” he said, as if he had come to a sudden determination. “It’s no use blinking the matter. I *am* in love with Phyllis—desperately in love, and what is more, I intend to marry her.

I admit that she fights shy of me, and you have aided and abetted her in that. You don't like me——”

“As the husband of my niece, certainly not. As a man of the world you may be all right—that depends on the point of view. From my point of view, and considering the schemes in which we have been associated, we have suited each other very well. I am not squeamish as to the company I keep. I am not a saint, and don't pretend to be one——”

“I should think not, indeed.”

“Nevertheless, there are limits,” the lawyer went on, without heeding the interruption. “My niece stands in a different category. I don't pretend to have much use for women, either individually or in bulk, but Phyl is different. She's good naturally. I don't know whether she's got religion or whether she hasn't, but I know she has not a mean streak in her nature. If there is anything in the world I reverence, it's that girl, and I tell you frankly she's too good for you. I've seen you loitering about and I've done my best to ward you off. You know what I am and I know what you are, and I say without any hesitation that you are not fit to marry a girl like Phyl. Why, you are not in the same street. You say you are in love with her. In my judgment you are much more in love with her money——”

“That's not true. If she hadn't a cent I would marry her.”

“Well, let it go at that. It makes no difference from my point of view.”

“Then you have got to change your point of view,” the baronet snapped viciously. “You admit that you have delivered yourself into my hands. I have only to speak the word and you are ruined now and for evermore. What is more, I am not going to let you off

without some *quid pro quo*. You have not only to give your consent to my marrying Phyllis, but you have to help my suit in every possible way. You must make me welcome at Pendare. You must encourage me to come. You must throw us together at every possible opportunity. You must speak well of me, extol my virtues——”

“Your virtues?” scornfully.

“If you think I haven’t any, you must invent a few. She is young yet; malleable; easily persuaded. You could make her believe that I am a modern Bayard—that as a husband I should be everything a woman could desire, that if she rejected me she would regret it to the day of her death. . . .”

“And those are your terms?”

“Those are my conditions, and, by Heaven, I am letting you down lightly. I don’t ask you to tell her that I have you under my thumb, and that unless she marries me you will go to prison. Coercive measures may have to be applied later, but I hope not. I want to have the opportunity of winning her. I want to get her to believe in me, and you can help in that enormously. Love with a girl depends on faith and propinquity. If she believes in me and trusts me she will become friendly, and propinquity will do the rest.”

“And suppose I do my best and propinquity fails, where do I stand?”

“If you do your best—carry out my instructions to the letter—I pledge you my word of honour that I will take no action against you.”

“No, Sir John, that is not good enough. If I am to deliver Phyllis into your hands, I must have better security than that. You may plead at any time that I have not done my best.”

"That is a question that we can settle later. The first point is, do you agree—assuming that you are properly safeguarded—to my proposition?"

"How long will you give me to decide?"

"I want a decision now, before I leave this room."

"You might give me until to-morrow."

"Not another hour. I am straining my conscience as it is. Your reply at once, Daniel Teague, or the law must take its course, and there will be no delay about it."

The lawyer glanced across at the hard, freckled face, the cruel mouth, the small shifty eyes, the heavy, determined jaw, and he knew that further words were useless. He hated to give the promise demanded, but what could he do? He loved his niece, but he loved himself more. To go to prison would be the end of everything; on the other hand, Phyllis had a will of her own, and neither he nor Tresize could compel her to marry if she was determined not to.

"Very well," he said wearily, "I give you my promise. We can arrange the question of safeguards to-morrow morning."

The baronet rose and picked up his hat and riding-crop and made for the door. Then he paused and turned himself round slowly.

"You have done well to decide to-day," he said, bringing out the words with vicious emphasis; "by to-morrow I might have changed my mind. By Heaven, you ought to be grateful. I have let you down lightly," and without waiting for a reply he pulled open the door and went out.

The lawyer sat in the same position for a considerable time after his visitor had taken his departure. Now that he had given his promise, he was anxious to discover reasonable if not sufficient justification. He

tried to prove to himself that his objection to Tresize as husband for Phyllis was purely sentimental. Tresize was no saint, of course. He had sown wild-oats freely for a good many years. He was an idler and a spend-thrift. He had never done anything to justify his existence, and in all probability never would. Still, he was no worse than a crowd of other young men in the same set, and if he got married he might settle down and become quite a respectable member of society.

Also he told himself that women, as far as he could judge, were not at all squeamish as to the type of man they married. If he could place them in a good social position and give them plenty of money to spend, they worried about nothing else. It was true that Phyllis gave no indication of being a woman of that type. But, then, how did he know? Human nature was much the same wherever you found it. Phyllis would be certain to marry some day, and after all she might do worse than marry Sir John.

And then there was the social position to be considered. Sir John was the only baronet within a radius of a dozen miles. Polgrain was a fine old house of considerable historic interest. The Tresizes as a family, it was said, dated from the time of the Phœnicians. The wife of Sir John would be Lady Tresize and would take her place among the élite of the county. What more could a girl desire?

Yes, taking everything into account, he had no doubt been let down lightly. He began to wonder why he had hesitated at all. At the first blush it had seemed as though he had been asked to sacrifice Phyllis body and soul to save his own skin, but further consideration had put an entirely new face on the matter. By using all the influence he had with Phyllis to get her to marry

Sir John, he might be doing a very praiseworthy thing.

After half an hour's profound meditation on these lines he felt considerably better. He was not such a selfish brute after all. He could look himself in the face once more without blushing. By saving himself he was probably doing the best possible for little Phyl.

The pallor left his face, the hard lines of his mouth relaxed, brightness came back to his eyes, the future looked rosy once more.

Swinging round in his chair, he began to tidy up the papers on his writing-table. That done, he closed and locked two or three drawers, then he rose to his feet, donned a light overcoat, seized his hat and umbrella, and passed into the outer office.

Peter Ruddock, his clerk, was bending over a high desk carefully copying an indenture. A pale girl near the window was industriously tapping a typewriter. The spring sunshine lay in a wide streak of pale gold across the dusty carpet. A scent of wallflowers came through the open window.

"Still at that indenture, Ruddock?" he demanded roughly. "You're almighty slow. If you don't buck up you will never make a lawyer."

"I've nearly finished, sir," Peter answered quietly. "Shall I make a draft of Timothy Jago's will next?"

"Yes. Get it done to-day if you can. As for the letters"—he turned to his typist—"I'll sign them to-morrow morning. See that everything is carefully locked up when you leave."

He pulled open the door, tripped lightly down the stairs, and passed into the street.

St. Runton was not a big town nor a particularly busy one. It was situated for the most part on the slope of a

hill, at the foot of which babbled a shallow and noisy river which lost itself in the sea at Portheven, less than two miles away.

For a moment or two Daniel Teague stood on the narrow side-walk and looked down the street. At a corner of the Market Square stood the Red Lion. He could see from where he stood its lurid sign swinging in the breeze. After the exciting and emotional time through which he had passed, he felt that a stiff peg of cognac would do him good. Should he yield to the temptation or should he not? Alas! he was constantly yielding to temptation. He was conscious of his weakness and occasionally hated himself for it, but to-day he needed a reviver. He would certainly be justified to-day.

He took a step down the hill, then pulled himself up suddenly. It was more than likely that Tresize would be there. He was not the man to come into town and go back again without a nip. He had no desire for another encounter with the baronet. He hated him, the big, blustering bully. He wished it were possible never to cross his path again.

He turned quickly on his heel and strode up the hill. Once over the brow, a fine stretch of rich and undulating country spread itself out before him. He stood still for a moment or two and drew deep breaths of the sweet and fragrant air. He raised his hat and permitted the soft breeze to play with his scanty locks. It was good to be alive, good to be free, good to sniff the pungent odours of spring.

Through an opening in the trees he caught a glimpse of Pendare on the opposite side of the green and shallow basin. It was the only point of the road from which a view could be got. How snugly it nestled on the

gentle slope ; how fair and smooth its terraced lawns.

Then the flutter of a white dress glimmered for a moment, and he gave an unconscious gasp.

"Dear little Phyl," he murmured. "Among her flowers, as usual." And suddenly a wave of remorse and shame swept over him and his knees seemed to give way beneath him. How could he face the happy child remembering the conspiracy into which he had entered ? What would she think of him if she knew ?

He walked to a gate by the roadside and leaned heavily upon it. All his buoyancy had vanished. All the arguments and sophisms with which he had fortified himself were swept clean out of his mind. He saw with dreadful clarity the moral issues involved. For tampering with John Tresize's filthy money the law could lock him up in prison and keep him there for years, but if he destroyed a woman's pure and trusting soul no human law could touch him. He realised now with tragic certitude that the offence he had committed against property was venal and paltry compared with the moral and spiritual transgression he had pledged himself to commit. And if for the former offence John Tresize had made him his slave—was dragging him, and would continue to drag him, at his chariot wheels—what of the latter and infinitely greater offence ? The sin against youthful innocence and a girl's loyal trust. No man-made law could touch him, he knew. The laws of the country took no cognisance of spiritual values. But what of God ? Would God let him escape ?

His knees still trembled, the perspiration stood in beads on his forehead. How long he stood there he did not know ; but he turned away at length.

"I can't face her yet," he said to himself, "I really can't. My nerves are in rags. I must fortify myself first," and he began to retrace his steps. The lure of the Red Lion was too strong to be resisted.

CHAPTER II

PHYLLIS AND HER GUARDIAN

SOME people said that Phyllis Dean was as pretty as a flower. Others declared that her face had not a single good feature. She had smoke-blue eyes—so often met with in Cornwall—and a mouth that even when in repose lingered on the brink of a smile. Her hair was abundant, golden-brown in colour, and refused to lie flat under any circumstances. She was, if anything, a little below the medium height, straight-limbed as a boy, lissome as a willow, and dainty in the shabbiest clothes.

But whether or no she could boast of good looks, she had undeniable charm. She was bright, vivacious, and good-tempered ; she had sympathy and imagination ; and, best of all, was delightfully free from self-consciousness. Anyone meeting her for the first time would put her age at seventeen—at the outside eighteen. In reality she was within a few months of her twenty-first birthday.

She believed that she was modern—quite modern. She was certainly modern in outlook and sympathy ; but the world—particularly the world of women—had moved faster than she knew. In truth, she knew little about the world or the people who lived in it. Her life from the first had been sheltered—almost secluded. When she returned, at the age of eighteen, from a fashionable boarding-school she was appallingly ignorant of the things that lay all about her. She had never

seen the seamy side of life, never encountered human nature at its worst. The people she had met had all been outwardly correct, and she was disposed to take everybody at his or her face value.

In that lay her chief danger. She had no experience to guide, no mother to instruct ; she had to trust to her own instincts—to her own inherent sense of moral values.

Her mother died when she was five. Her father seven years later. Since then she had been left to the guardianship of Daniel Teague, her mother's brother, and as far as she knew her only relative.

At the time of Robert Dean's death Daniel was practising (with no great success) as a solicitor in Plymouth. He was forty-five years of age and a bachelor. He was not a bad man as men go, but weak, with a passion for gambling and speculation, and a *penchant* for getting into debt.

It did not take him long to transfer himself and his belongings from Devonshire to Cornwall. He was tired of Plymouth, and hopeless of making much headway in the world. A fresh start in a fresh place, with a stewardship thrown in, was just what he needed, he told himself. He was sorry, of course, that his brother-in-law had died so unexpectedly, but his grief was by no means poignant, and he was not a little flattered that Robert had appointed him guardian of his child and steward of his estate.

The change from his diggings in Plymouth to the large and beautifully-appointed house in which his sister had spent her all too brief married life filled him with unmeasured satisfaction. He had almost the status of "lord of the manor," with a pleasing sense of responsibility—a responsibility, however, which sat lightly on

his shoulders. That he knew nothing about children did not trouble him. Betty Martin and her husband, Elijah—who had been at Pendare from the beginning of Robert Dean's married life—were fixtures, if they liked to remain so, until Phyllis came of age. Both Betty and 'Lijah were devoted to the child, and Daniel had no doubt that they would look after her quite satisfactorily without bothering him.

What did worry Daniel a little was the fact that, though he was guardian of the child and steward of the estate, he was not sole executor. He would have liked to have had the whole thing in his own hands. There would have been possibilities in such an arrangement—possibilities the mere contemplation of which almost made his mouth water.

His first interview with Colonel Bolitho, his co-executor, convinced him, however, that there would be no room for his speculative talent as far as the Pendare estate was concerned. The Colonel was not only a stern though kindly soldier, but a shrewd business man. Perhaps he estimated Daniel at his true value, as Robert Dean had evidently done. Anyhow, he saw to it that the provisions of the will were strictly carried out, that the sum allowed for running the house and the education of Phyllis was not exceeded, and that every surplus penny was invested in gilt-edged securities.

Daniel inwardly resented the meticulousness of the Colonel. He could have done so much better if left to himself. The interest derived from gilt-edged securities was ridiculously small. He could double the interest and even the principal if allowed to have his own way. He wisely, however, kept his opinion to himself. The Colonel was not to be lured into any bypath of speculation, however rosy it might be made

to appear. The "Will" was there, and he was determined that its provisions should be strictly carried out.

Daniel would have speculated with Phyllis's surplus income—not with any intention to defraud. He honestly believed that he could put money into his niece's pockets and into his own at the same time. He sometimes almost prayed that when the Colonel rode to hounds he would be thrown from his horse and break his neck. He would then be able to administer the estate in his own way. So many chances were constantly turning up—so many opportunities of making a scoop. The Colonel was a stupid, pig-headed old fogey, who could not see a good thing when it was under his nose, and refused to consider Phyl's financial interests when he had the chance.

Fortunately for Phyllis, Daniel's prayer remained unanswered. The Colonel was not thrown from his horse, and his neck remained in a perfectly sound condition. Once every quarter he rode over to Pendare and went carefully through all the accounts. Phyllis enjoyed those visits. He always stayed to lunch—sometimes to dinner—and, what was more important from her point of view, he always found in one of his big pockets a nice box of chocolates.

In spite of his bigness, his fierce iron-grey moustache, and his loud drill-sergeant voice, she was not the least afraid of him. She was a little afraid of her uncle sometimes—he had his fits of peevishness and depression, and at such times she was careful to keep out of his way. But the Colonel was never peevish. He had a big hearty laugh which made the house ring. His hard, stern mouth twisted now and then into the most delightful smile, and his blue eyes twinkled like stars on summer nights.

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She sometimes wished that the Colonel lived at Pendare altogether, and occasionally wondered why her father had chosen Uncle Dan to be her guardian. Pendare was an infinitely jollier place when the Colonel was about. He took so much interest in things : in the kittens, and pigs, and flowers, and cabbages ; in her frocks, and toys, and lessons. He told her stories which made her laugh, and he laughed with her in his jolly, rollicking way.

Uncle Dan never told her stories or interested himself in her clothes or lessons. As a matter of fact, in those early days Phyllis bored him, sometimes irritated him. He told her that she was a long-legged, mischievous tomboy, which, curiously enough, she did not in the least resent ; indeed, she rather gloried in the description. She had no playmates, hence she was driven to amusing herself : which she did by climbing trees, chasing squirrels, climbing over fences and jumping ditches, with frequently very disastrous results to her clothes.

Betty looked a little alarmed occasionally when she came in plastered with mud and her skirts torn to ribbons, but she rarely scolded her. " It is perfectly natural," she told her husband. " The dear child is as healthy as a cat and as full of spirit as a fox-terrier ; so what can you expect ? "

So Phyllis ran wild until she was thirteen, and then Daniel insisted that she should be sent to a boarding-school. He had met her one afternoon returning to the house " looking," he declared, " like a drowned rat."

There was no reason, of course, why she should have fallen into the leat. There was a wooden footbridge considerably higher up the stream which she might have

crossed, and indeed ought to have crossed, but whoever knew a long-legged tomboy take the safe path across a stream when it might be accomplished by an exciting and adventurous leap. Of course she could do it. She had leaped much farther dozens of times. A good long run, a spring into the air, and there you were safe on the opposite bank.

Phyllis took the run, gave a mighty leap, and just managed to touch the farther bank with her toes. Then followed a tremendous splash as she fell backward and disappeared. A moment later she was on her feet looking considerably scared.

"Oh, goodness gracious!" she gasped, as she rubbed the water out of her eyes with her fists.

Then she looked down at her dripping clothes and at the clear water swirling about her feet and legs.

"Well, this is a lark," she reflected, and she scrambled up the bank, and made for the house as fast as her clinging clothes and squelching shoes would permit.

As bad luck would have it, she almost ran into her uncle, who at sight of her stood stock still for a moment, then burst into a loud guffaw.

It was almost the first time she had ever heard him laugh and she did not like it. She did not think it was a nice laugh. There was nothing joyous about it. It was not to be compared with the Colonel's rollicking thunder.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "you look like a drowned rat."

"I'm not a bit like a rat," she said indignantly, "and I'm not drowned."

"Of all the disreputable figures I ever saw," he went on, "you take the prize."

She looked demurely down at her dripping skirts

and water-logged shoes. "I am a little damp," she remarked indifferently.

"Damp?" and he guffawed again. "But what in the name of common sense have you been doing?"

"I jumped the leat," she said stoutly, "and landed in the water."

"Landed in the water, eh? More water than land, by the look of things."

"There was a lot of land at the bottom," she said defiantly.

"But, child, you might have been drowned," he protested.

"Oh no. I knew how deep it was," she answered calmly.

"But a bit out of reckoning as to width, eh?"

"I jumped too soon; that was all."

"Well, you had better go and hear what Betty has to say."

"Oh, Betty will only say, 'Mercy on us!' and 'Dear lamb!' and 'Whatever have you been a-doin'?'"

"She is more likely to get a stick and give you a thrashing."

"Oh no. Betty knows what is good for me," and she ran past him and disappeared into the house.

Betty said nothing for several moments. The sight of her darling with water dripping from her skirts, her hair hanging in straight wisps over her ears and down her back, her hands covered with slime, completely took her breath away.

"You poor lamb!" she gasped at length. "'Ave you come 'ome drowned at last?"

"Not quite, Betty," was the serious answer, "but I feel awfully damp. Don't you think I ought to have some dry clothes?"

"You must have a warm bath first thing," was the reply. "Slip off most of your things where you are while I go and turn the hot water on."

Half an hour later she was sitting before the fire in the servants' hall giving Betty a full and particular account of her adventure.

"You know, uncle was not a bit nice," she confided. "He actually laughed, and not a joyful laugh, either."

"He never had no children of his own, my sweet," Betty comforted.

"And perhaps he has forgotten what it is like to be young."

"Very likely. People do forget such things sometimes. The more the pity of it."

"I hope I shall never forget, Betty dear."

That escapade decided Phyllis's fate for the next five years. On the following day Daniel began to make inquiries about girls' schools. Then he wrote to various establishments for prospectuses, and finally decided on a school in the south of Devon.

"Not too near home," he reflected, "so that she will have no temptation to run away if she is dissatisfied."

Betty shed a good many tears in secret, but Phyllis was delighted. It was a new adventure. At last she was going out into the great world that lay beyond the park, beyond St. Runton, beyond the ridge of the farthest hills. She would see fresh places, fresh people, and have a lot of girl companions. No one could tell what might happen, what wonderful dreams might come true. The lure of the unknown thrilled her, threw its glamour over her, filled her with ecstasy.

How often she had sat high up in the branches of a tree, and looked away beyond the fields, beyond the

farmsteads, beyond the distant woods and still more distant hills, and wondered what lay beyond. Away, away . . . somewhere in the outer infinite must lie the great cities of which she had heard and read. The great rivers and harbours where ships that held more people than lived in St. Runton town came to anchor. The great castles and mansions and palaces, and more than all, the great people who ruled the nations. Pendare, of course, was very beautiful and she loved it, but the things that were really wonderful lay out there in the great beyond, and now she was going to see with her own eyes some of the things about which she had dreamed.

Of course, the reality did not come up her expectations. No reality ever equals the dreams of youth. Devonshire was no more beautiful than Cornwall, nor half so beautiful in her eyes. While Barton Regis could not compare with St. Runton either in size or importance. It is true the little town hugged a wide and sandy beach, but the sea looked like a pale shallow pool compared with the mighty deep that lay beyond Portheven.

She went to bed the first night bitterly disappointed, and cried herself to sleep. For the first few weeks she felt terribly homesick and longed for the comforting arms of Betty ; but time brought healing and some measure of forgetfulness. She spent two years at Barton Regis, and amongst other things learnt to swim. Then Daniel removed her to a school in Hampshire, when she spent another two years, and finally she spent twelve months at Eastbourne, where the finishing-touches were put on her education.

Her last Easter vacation she spent with school friends at Hampstead, and this led to her first real acquaintance with London.

London almost came up to her expectations, but not quite—at least at the beginning. The weather was raw and cold, with a biting wind and frequent splashes of rain and sleet. The streets were dirty and the buses sent streams of liquid mud on to the pavements. The houses looked gloomy and cold, and the plane-trees she thought were afflicted with some kind of skin disease.

But after a few days the wind veered round to the south, the air became soft and balmy, and the sun shone out of a cloudless sky. The effect was almost magical. London looked as if it had had a bath and had put on clean clothes. Phyllis began to revise her first impressions. St. Paul's was wonderful—amazing. Westminster Abbey a dream, and the shops, of course, were glorious. By the end of a fortnight she was able to find her way about alone. It was only a little bit she saw, the centre of which was Piccadilly Circus, but she explored it with considerable thoroughness. Also she was taken to a concert at the Albert Hall, to the opera at Covent Garden, and one night they dined at the Savoy. That night she felt as though some of her dreams had come true.

Yet it was not until later, when she looked back and tried to sort out her impressions, that she realised how much those few weeks in London had meant to her—how unconsciously they had enlarged her view and broadened her horizon. At first she had been a trifle bewildered. The days had been so crowded that her impressions were blurred and indistinct, but later on, when she had had time to separate scenes and events one from the other, she was able to realise something of the vastness and complexity of life and the world.

A few weeks after her eighteenth birthday she returned home for good—the finished product of the English boarding-school system. In hockey, gymnastics, dancing and arithmetic she excelled. She could read French easily and speak it with difficulty. She had more than a nodding acquaintance with English literature and a rather fine appreciation of poetry ; beyond that there was nothing to call for remark.

She was glad to get home again, for many things. Glad to escape from the conventions and routine of school life. She wanted to regain her old freedom—wanted rest and quiet and time to think.

She was in a rather pensive mood when she drove in an open taxi from St. Runton station to Pendare. Her uncle had met her and sat by her side and insisted on talking all the time, and she did not want to talk. She wanted to be quiet. She was feeling too acutely for words. There was always a shadow of sadness, almost of pain, in her homecoming. There were no mother's arms to welcome her. No father's smile, no laughter of brothers and sisters. She was an orphan girl and terribly alone.

She gave a little gasp when she caught a glimpse of Pendare as they turned the brow of the hill, and her pulses quickened. It looked very beautiful and "homey," nestled among the trees. Then her eyes swept the wide expanse of country. The cornfields were beginning to ripen—some, indeed, were ready for the reapers. The woods and plantations were looking their best, and over all lay the glory of the sunshine. Then her eyes sought the distant hills, faintly purple against the blue of the sky, and she thought of the great beyond from which she had come. There was no longer any mystery. She had been there and had

seen. The glamour and romance of childhood had evaporated little by little, and all that was left was just hard facts and reality.

Betty was at the door when the taxi rolled up, her lips trembling, her eyes misty with tears. A moment later she was laughing and crying and talking and kissing all in the same breath.

For a few days Betty watched Phyllis with considerable anxiety. Then very reverently and sincerely she thanked the Lord that "boarding-school" not had spoiled her. This was quite true. She was eighteen and still a girl, without cant or pose of affectation.

For a few days Pendare seemed quiet and almost tame. Then all her old interests and enthusiasms came to life again, and it seemed to her sometimes as though she had never been away at all.

For the first time Daniel Teague began to take an interest in her, and he found her profoundly interesting. He could no longer say of her that she was just a girl. She was much more than a girl. It was impossible to ignore her. She somehow created an atmosphere that was entirely new and fresh and wonderfully stimulating.

He found himself studying her manners, watching her conduct, listening to her talk. She filled the house with brightness and sunshine. A girl still in many ways, and yet a woman.

It was, however, between her return from school and her twenty-first year that she developed most rapidly. All that had preceded this period was but a preparation. She accepted what she had been taught before, now she began to think out things for herself. She interested herself in everything—social reform, politics, finance, political economy, and scientific agriculture. Her days

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were crowded from dawn to sunset, and being busy she was naturally quite happy.

Marriage was a question that had not begun to trouble her, and so she had no suspicion of the trap that was being laid for her by Sir John Tresize and her uncle.

CHAPTER III

PREPARING THE WAY

WHEN Daniel Teague retraced his steps to St. Runton he avoided the Red Lion. He was still afraid that Sir John Tresize might be there, and every minute as it passed intensified his feeling of anger against the baronet. He himself had been a fool, of course, and in the eyes of the law something much worse ; but Sir John's cowardly and unholy desire to get hold of Phyllis—an innocent girl who had no conception of the type of man he was—was nothing short of sacrilege, and to be compelled himself to help in the dastardly plot filled him with loathing.

Turning down a side-street, he soon found himself in the bar-parlour of the Greyhound. The room was empty, and ordering a noggin of cognac, he threw himself into an arm-chair and groaned. When the brandy was brought he drank it neat, then ordered a further supply, together with a siphon of soda-water. He had no intention of staying long. He just wanted to brace himself for the ordeal that was in front of him. By the time two pegs of brandy had passed down his throat he felt better. Alcohol makes some people quarrelsome ; on Daniel it had the opposite effect. When he had finished his third glass he felt quite cheerful and courageous.

Habitué's of the Greyhound dropped in one by one, most of whom Daniel knew. Talk became general and

animated. Daniel was nothing loth to contribute his quota. There was nothing of value in the talk. For the most part it was a sustained grumble. Had the Prime Minister or the Home Secretary or the Chancellor of the Exchequer been present, he might have been a little astonished at some of the views expressed, and tickled at the quaint originality of some of the remarks.

The world was upside down, of course. Everybody felt that. The spurt of good trade that had followed the Great War had vanished like a pricked bubble; since when things had gone from bad to worse. Most of the Cornish mines had shut down. Agriculture had suddenly slumped, strikes were the order of the day, and unemployment was growing to alarming proportions. Daniel, being a lawyer and a gentleman, as well as the steward of Pendare and the uncle of Phyllis Dean, found himself being listened to with the greatest respect. This flattered his vanity and conduced further to his cheerfulness. Time passed unheeded, so that when he turned his back on the Greyhound the soft blue eye of the spring day was beginning to close, and the twilight deepened with every step he took.

Instead of reaching Pendare in time for an early tea, he was barely in time for dinner. Phyllis was waiting for him a little anxiously on the doorstep.

"Why, uncle," she said, "how late you are! I was hesitating whether or not to go in search of you."

At the sound of her voice so full of tender solicitude his feeble conscience stirred again. What a brute he was! If she only knew the truth, she would never trouble about him again.

He quickly recovered himself, however. The effect of his libations had not yet worn off.

"Been frightfully busy," he said, with a cheerful ring

in his voice. "Work comes in rushes, you know. Is dinner nearly ready?"

"It's not only ready, but waiting," she said, with a smile.

"Sorry, my girl. I'll be with you in two ticks. No time to dress to-night," and he rushed upstairs to the bathroom.

A few minutes later he was seated smiling at the head of the table. She looked at him and was comforted. He had been peevish and depressed for a week past. Sometimes he had sat through a whole meal without speaking a word. She had felt alarmed more than once at his lowness of spirits. To-night, however, he was quite himself again.

"You ought not to work so late," she said; "it is not good for you."

"My dear, work never kills," he laughed. "It's worry that plays the mischief."

"Have you been worried of late?" she questioned.

"Why, Phyl?"

"Well, you have seemed worried," she replied.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I have been. Things are in an awful muddle, as you know. Country seems to be going to the dogs. Trade slumping in all directions. Farmers complaining about their rents. Clients worrying about their mortgages. Money so scarce that it is like squeezing juice out of a cork. However, the worst is over as far as I am concerned, and I'm not going to dig any more people out of the mud."

"So your worries arise from other people? Of course, I might have known that. Still, if one can lend a helping hand, uncle——"

"One needs a hundred hands these days, and when

he has done his best he is not likely to get any thanks for it."

"Oh, we ought not to consider thanks," she smiled.

"We've got to consider ourselves, Phyl, or nobody else will consider us. You'll find that out before so very long."

"Why 'before so very long,' uncle?"

"Because, my dear, in a few months from now, as you know, you will be out of leading-strings . . . your own mistress . . . independent of your old uncle and everybody else. Paddling your own canoe, as it were."

"Well?"

"I don't want to discourage you, of course, but you'll find yourself in a pretty rough sea."

"And you think I shall not be able to keep afloat?"

"No, I don't say that, but the danger is, you may try to take too many people on board. You are generous—too generous for this selfish world. A strong hand is needed these times. I suppose you don't intend to take to yourself a husband?"

"Good gracious, no. Whatever put such an idea into your head?"

"Just a sudden thought, Phil. You are of age, you know. It might be a good thing for you to get married. A man's steady hand, you know——"

"My own hands are quite steady, thank you. Besides, I have no intention of giving up my freedom."

"Oh, as to that," he said, with a laugh, "there does not seem much less freedom in double harness than in single."

"How do you know, when you have never tried it?" she flung at him.

"Perhaps I should have been better off if I had tried

it," he retorted. "A bachelor is but a lopsided animal, after all, and an unmarried woman is more lopsided still."

"That is merely a man's point of view," she smiled. "Women can do without men just as well as men can do without women, and in many instances a good deal better. It is just man's conceit to assume that he is a superior creature and that only he can stand alone."

"Perhaps the truth is we can none of us stand alone," he said seriously. "We all seem in some curious way to be propping each other up. Everybody is more or less dependent on somebody else. There is no such thing as complete independence or complete freedom unless one lives on an uninhabited island, and that's a poor business, as Robinson Crusoe quickly discovered, and glad enough he was to have man Friday to help him along."

"Well, uncle," she queried, "and what's all this leading to?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing!" he laughed.

He was still abnormally cheerful. He had not yet thrown off the effects of the brandy he had drunk. His anæmic conscience had dropped to sleep again. He felt that he had made a good beginning—a very good beginning, and that it would be wisdom on his part not to pursue the subject further for the present.

"A word at a time," he reflected, "just a word. If too much is said she may become suspicious."

"Funny how conversation trips from one subject to another," he said aloud. "I vote that we have a little music after we have finished dinner. What do you say?"

"If you like, uncle." She was delighted to find him so cheerful and so talkative, and anxious to do her best

to keep him in such a pleasant frame of mind. Phyllis was not by any means a brilliant pianist, nor was her voice of any great compass. What there was of it, however, was of good quality and had been well trained.

Daniel selected the songs. In what Phyllis called his better moods he was inclined to be sentimental and even emotional. She started with "The Lost Chord," which was followed by "The Rosary." Daniel sat with his finger-tips pressed together and his eyes closed. Now and then his lips moved as if he were repeating the words after her. Like many another man of doubtful morality, he had a distinctly religious vein in his composition. He liked to have his emotions touched, and hoped perhaps that when he "felt good" it would be counted to him for righteousness.

"You sing beautifully, my dear," he said, when the last notes of "The Rosary" died away. "Your voice is sympathetic. I like a sympathetic voice." And he placed three other songs on the music-rest. "I hear thee calling me," "Just a song at twilight," and "Thy voice is near me in my dreams."

Phyllis could not help smiling; and she wondered, as she had often done before, if some flower of romance had not bloomed far back in her uncle's life—bloomed for only a little while, perhaps, and then had drooped and died, yet leaving a fragrance that would never wholly depart.

She did not know and she never questioned him, and he never alluded to his early life.

When she had finished, he rose slowly to his feet and turned his face toward the door.

"Thank you, my dear," he said huskily. "It's pleasant to hear the old songs again, and you sang them with great feeling."

When he woke next morning his head ached, and he felt more depressed than usual. During breakfast he did his best to appear cheerful, but he never once met the clear, honest eyes of his niece. He hated himself again, and loathed the part he had to play, yet knew there was no escape for him.

It took him a good half-hour to reach his office, and generally he enjoyed the walk. It was almost the only physical exercise he took. To-day he walked more slowly than usual. He dreaded the coming interview with Sir John. He knew he would have to listen to unpleasant—perhaps insulting—things, and he would be helpless under the lash of his tongue. How bitterly true it was that “the way of transgressors is hard.”

He found a cheerful fire burning in his office grate, for which he was thankful. There was a nip in the spring air which seemed to penetrate to his bones.

On his writing-table lay a number of typed letters, also a draft of Timothy Jago's will. He read all the letters slowly and carefully before signing them. Then he turned his attention to the will. He had just completed a number of corrections when there came a knock at the door and Sir John sauntered in. He had evidently motored into town this morning, for he wore a heavy fur-lined coat and carried in his hand a pair of motoring gloves. He pulled off his coat at once and hung it on the door, and threw his gloves on to a vacant chair. Then he sat down opposite the lawyer and eyed him truculently. Daniel returned his stare, but did not speak.

“I suppose you are ready for business?” Sir John questioned shortly.

“Quite.”

“That's good, for I have no time to waste. I have thought the matter out since yesterday, and I have come

to the conclusion that it would be unpleasant for my future wife to have her uncle in jail—unpleasant for her and for me.”

“ If I were in jail you would never get her,” Daniel retorted.

“ Oh, wouldn’t I ? But we need not talk about that now. I have decided not to prosecute in view of the undertaking you gave me yesterday, but I have decided also—for the present at least—to hold you responsible for the money——”

“ Go on.”

“ That’s what I’m doing. In return for the bogus mortgage deed with which you hoodwinked me, you will give me a promissory note for £1,200. That note, however, I will cancel on the day I marry Phyllis.”

“ And suppose you don’t marry her ? ”

“ In that event you will have to pay me the money even if I have to sell the coat off your back. You need not worry on that score, however. I shall marry her all right. I’m not usually thwarted when I set my mind on a thing. I am anxious in this case, however, that everything should go smoothly. I don’t want to resort to extreme measures. You see, I am talking quite plainly to you.”

The lawyer nodded, but did not speak.

“ Twelve hundred pounds, I calculate, will be an inducement to you to do your best. In case everything goes smoothly you may expect something handsome beyond. You understand me, I hope ? ”

“ Quite.”

“ You don’t say that you are grateful.”

“ I’m not. I loathe the whole business, but I have given my word and there’s an end of it. I’ve played the fool——”

"Played the rogue, you mean," the baronet interjected.

"In the eyes of the law, yes ; but I never meant to defraud you."

"All rogues say that when they are caught," the baronet flung at him.

Daniel winced, but he did not reply. Taking a contract note from a drawer in his writing-table he began to write :

"I promise to pay on demand," etc.

Sir John watched him closely. Daniel paused at length and looked up.

"That is all right as far as it goes," said the baronet, "but you must add : 'The same to bear interest from date hereof at the rate of six per cent. per annum.'"

Daniel added the words and signed his name, then pushed it across the table.

Sir John picked it up, read it carefully, then folded it and placed it in his pocket-book. That done, he drew from another pocket the bogus mortgage deed and threw it across the table. "If that had come into court," he muttered savagely, "it would have meant penal servitude for you."

Without a word Daniel seized it, glanced down its pages, then threw it on the fire and watched it burn.

The baronet eyed him grimly, with a sinister smile on his cruel lips. When only ashes remained of the incriminating document, he remarked cynically,

"Feel better now, I expect."

"Perhaps . . . Perhaps not . . . I'm not certain I wouldn't be happier in jail."

Sir John gave a snort of disgust. "For Heaven's sake don't cant," he sneered.

Daniel continued to watch the crumbling ashes with

tragic eyes, his face drawn and twisted. His assumptions of the day before no longer weighed with him—would never weigh with him again. He saw with dreadful clearness what such a marriage would mean. Phyllis was malleable, trusting, unsuspicious. Sir John was handsome in a coarse animal way. In spite of his record he was popular with women. He had the knack of making himself agreeable. Would Phyllis be proof against him? She did not like him now, but she had seen comparatively little of him. He had done his best to keep them apart. She was still heart-whole and liable to be caught by the first passionate wooer. She knew nothing of his record—had no idea of his real character. She would take him at his face value, believe his promises and protestations; while he, whose duty it was to warn and protect her, would have to approve and encourage, and help to build the altar for the sacrifice. And even if his wooing failed. If she stoutly and stubbornly refused him. What then? . . .

He brushed his hand across his eyes as if to shut out the vision that suddenly unfolded itself.

Sir John's voice broke in on his meditations:

"I want you to invite me to dinner at the earliest opportunity."

"It is not my house," Daniel said sullenly.

"I am aware of that; but Phyllis will do anything you ask her. You might invite my mother at the same time. It will be a good beginning. Mother knows my wishes and approves. Between us we shall manage splendidly," and without waiting for a reply, he donned his overcoat, picked up his hat and gloves, and turned toward the door.

Daniel lifted his head suddenly and stretched out his hands as if he meant to make a final appeal, but thought

better of it. What would be the use? He knew only too well the man with whom he was dealing.

A week later the little dinner-party was duly celebrated. Phyllis raised no objection to her uncle's proposal. Indeed, she was rather pleased at the idea. She looked very pretty in a simple evening gown, and played the part of hostess with quiet dignity.

Lady Tresize, ponderous in heavy silks, was graciousness itself. Sir John played his part to perfection. In evening clothes he seemed to lose some part of his grossness. He was attentive, but never over-attentive, he paid no compliment and was careful not to obtrude himself in any way. He scarcely touched wine at dinner, while Daniel helped himself freely. Over the cigars, after the ladies had retired. Daniel made further attempts to justify himself. The whole evening was a nightmare to him. Sir John's sleekness and suavity irritated him almost beyond bearing.

In the drawing-room Phyllis sang two or three songs, Lady Tresize playing her accompaniments; and then with friendly good-nights their guests took their departure.

When the sound of their motor-car had died away down the drive Phyllis gave a little laugh.

"Well," she said, "I think both Sir John and his mother have been charming."

Daniel groaned inwardly, but did not reply.

"Do you know," she went on, "when you suggested that we should invite them I felt a bit frightened. Lady Tresize is such an imposing person, and ever since I can remember I have always stood terribly in awe of her. Of course, I have not seen her often. But to-night no one in the world could have been nicer. She says she

wants to see more of me and thinks we might be great friends.”

“Very likely,” Daniel assented, without meeting her eyes.

“She told me that Sir John thinks no end of you, which of course is very nice of him.”

Daniel walked across to the window and unnecessarily straightened a curtain.

“She is evidently very proud of her son,” Phyllis continued. “It seems the reason he has never married is—he is so devoted to his mother. You would not think so, would you, to look at him?”

“You don’t like his looks?” Daniel questioned.

“Well, in a way, no, though I must say he looks rather well in evening clothes, and he certainly knows how to behave. He is one of those people who improve on acquaintance. Don’t you think so?”

“Possibly. You see, I meet him chiefly in the way of business.”

“Well, anyhow, I am glad the evening has passed off so pleasantly. Now I think I will go to bed, for I am just a little tired,” and giving her cheek to be kissed, she left the room.

CHAPTER IV

THE SNARE OF THE FOWLER

SIR JOHN was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet. Having surmounted the initial difficulty, the way seemed straight and easy in front of him. That Phyllis would be a little shy and diffident at the outset he quite expected. She was young and inexperienced, with little or no knowledge of the world or its ways. But that might prove to his advantage. Her ignorance and innocence would make her an easy prey. There was no other man in the field. He would be her first lover, and he had sufficient faith in his powers of persuasion to make him confident of success.

He was no novice in the art of making love. He had had a much wider experience, he believed, than most men of his years. It was true that his conquests had not been in his own station, but women, he held, were all alike—they were all weak and sentimental, and ready to trust any man who made love to them, and he did not suppose that Phyllis would be any exception to the rule.

Moreover, he had persuaded himself that he was genuinely in love with her. At any rate, no other girl had so completely taken his fancy. Also, when she came of age she would be the mistress of a considerable fortune—that was a factor not to be overlooked. He had known her since she was a child, for he was fifteen years her senior. He had seen her grow into girlhood and

womanhood. He had kept his eye on her ever since she returned from school. It was true he had not often spoken to her. Daniel Teague had seen to that. And when he had spoken—quite casually, and in the presence of a number of other people—she had naturally treated him with indifference. He was not concerned about that. He supposed she looked on him as a middle-aged man and entirely out of her circle, but he would soon convince her that he was not a bit too old. Girls liked men considerably older than themselves. They did not care for mere youths—they often despised them ; but when men of the world—men with wide experience—paid them attention they felt flattered.

He was quite convinced that Phyllis would be as wax in his hands. He was big and masterful, and women loved to be mastered. They had no use for a tame or tepid lover ; they liked to be swept off their feet—carried away by an irresistible wave of passion and emotion.

He smiled grimly as these thoughts passed through his mind. Failure he would not contemplate for a moment. Who ever heard of a Tresize failing where women were concerned ? He was out to win, and win he would, by fair means if possible, if not—— Well, there were always other ways.

It was time he settled down. His mother was constantly reminding him of that. He had been sowing wild-oats long enough. He could not go on indefinitely creating scandals. He hoped none of these scandals had reached Phyllis's ears. He did not think it was likely. Still, there was always a danger. Hence the sooner he got married the better. When he was safely married it would not matter what stories reached her ears.

He was never troubled by any question of morality. Strictly speaking he had no morals, and he cared little for conventions. He would not condescend to anything so vulgar as cheating or stealing, but beyond that everything was fair game. The common law of the state he recognised—it was broadly in the interests of his own class—but any higher law had no existence for him. He had no reverence for the finer things of life. Purity and chastity were meaningless words. At heart he was a pagan and a savage.

It was because of this that Daniel Teague objected so strongly to him and did his best to keep his niece out of his clutches. He had seen for months past that Phyllis had caught the man's evil fancy. Hence his remorse and shame when he found himself enmeshed in the toils. The very thing he dreaded was happening, and he had to assist in its realisation. Of all the ironies of his weak and stumbling life, this was the most bitter and humiliating.

Less than a week after the evening spent at Pendare, Sir John drove over in his motor-car to pay his dinner call. Phyllis was in the garden busily engaged in planting roots and bulbs. At the sound of wheels she looked up with a start, then dropped her trowel, pulled off her gloves and walked slowly across the lawn to greet her guest. She was not particularly well pleased at being caught in *deshabille*, neither was she pleased at seeing him alone.

Pulling up with a sudden jerk, Sir John stepped quickly out. Then he divested himself of his dust-coat and gloves and threw them on the seat of the car. This done, he advanced to meet Phyllis with raised hat and hand outstretched.

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"I must apologise for coming alone," he said, in his blandest manner. "It is such a glorious day that my mother insisted on my getting out the car and bringing her. Then at the last moment she felt too unwell to come—one of her neuralgic headaches that always come on suddenly. I wanted to stay at home with her, but she would not hear of it; declared that it was time our dinner call was paid or you would think us heathens. Sent tons of love and thousands of good wishes, and asked me to tell you that she will be coming along herself at the earliest opportunity. So here I am, a willing slave to duty. I hope I have not called at an inconvenient time!" and he bowed stiffly, then replaced his hat.

"I am sorry Lady Tresize is not well," Phyllis said quietly. "I hope she will soon be better; but she should not have concerned herself about the dinner call."

"And what of me?" he said, forcing a laugh. "Don't tell me, please, that I am unwelcome."

"You must take your welcome for granted," she answered, with slight hesitation. "But I expect uncle home early this afternoon. Perhaps you will stay to tea."

"I should love to," he replied eagerly.

"Then we will have tea in the garden. Please excuse me for a few minutes," and she walked past him into the house.

Sir John walked across the lawn to a garden seat on the opposite side. He did not sit on it, however. He threw himself on the warm, dry turf, and leaning on his elbow kept his eyes fixed on the house. The day was like a slice out of late summer that had got wedged into the middle of spring. There was no wind. A few fleecy clouds hung in the sky, as though anchored by

invisible chains. The trees stood as if waiting and listening for the coming of a breeze. Not a leaf stirred. Down in the glen the leat gurgled in the shadow of the alders. Far down the stream a duck quacked. Those were the only sounds that broke the stillness.

Phyllis appeared at length, having discarded her battered straw hat and blue overall and donned a simple frock of figured muslin, with a sash of blue ribbon about her waist. A wire-brimmed Leghorn hat adorned her head and threw the piquant face into shadow.

She looked very girlish and dainty as she swung across the lawn in the direction of her visitor ; and close behind came 'Lijah carrying a light wicker table and a basket chair.

Tresize watched her every movement through half-closed eyes—watched her as hungry cat might watch a mouse, or a lizard might watch a fly. Her youth and innocence appealed to his jaded palate, and he hungered to get possession of her.

Phyllis appeared to take no notice of him, though she was acutely conscious of his presence. She directed 'Lijah to place the table in the shade of a copper beech, and then to fetch a couple more chairs.

Sir John got up from his recumbent position and moved into the shadow of the beech. Then he sat down on the turf and hugged his knees.

“ This hot weather isn't going to last,” he remarked, looking up into the sky. “ We shall have to pay for it later on.”

“ I am afraid we shall,” she answered absently.

“ Glorious while it lasts, though . . . How well your garden looks, and your chestnuts are just fine . . . Nice old place this . . . I suppose you are awfully fond of it ? ”

“ Why, naturally, Sir John.”

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"But don't you get awfully bored being so much alone?"

"Why, no" (in a tone of surprise). "Why should I? I am kept so busy that I have no time to feel bored."

"Busy, eh? Now, what in the world can you have to keep you busy?"

"Oh, dozens of things. For one thing I spend hours in the garden. Then there is the house. I can't leave everything to Betty. Then there are scores and scores of books I want to read. Besides which, I go one day a week to the hospital, and another day to our mothers' meeting."

"Oh, Jerusalem!" he ejaculated, "fancy you at a mothers' meeting. What do you find to say to the old women?"

"It isn't merely a matter of saying, but of doing. We give them lessons in cookery, and hygiene, and domestic economy generally."

He gave a big laugh. "Well, I never. I thought——"

"That I was a slacker and an idler," she interrupted. "I hope I shall never be that. While there is so much to be done and so many things to learn it would be a shame to be idle."

"But I thought you learnt everything at school; that is, everything you needed to learn."

It was her turn to laugh now. "Did you learn everything you wanted to at school?" she questioned.

"I know I was compelled to learn a lot of stuff I *didn't* want to," he replied. "And as far as I can see it has never done me any good. Take Latin, for instance, and history, and poetry, and stuff like that. What's the use of it?"

She laughed again and evaded a direct reply. "Of course we go on learning after we leave school," she said.

"School gives us a start and a taste. The most important part of our education no doubt comes after."

"You think so?"

"Well, I am discovering every day how little I know. I do so want to get abreast of things. Sociology, for instance, and political economy, and——"

"Hold hard, please," he cried, with a great shout of laughter. "Now do tell me, Phyllis—you won't mind me calling you Phyllis, will you?—you see, I have known you since you were a kid. But do tell me what such things have to do with a girl? What on earth——? But no, don't tell me. Let us talk of something more interesting."

"But surely," she replied a little indignantly, "if you are interested in politics, and finance, and political economy——"

"But I'm not," he laughed.

"Not even in politics?" she questioned.

"Oh, I'm a Conservative, of course. The Tresize's always have been and always will be, I hope; but as for the game they are playing up in London—well, it beats me. . . . But here comes your butler with the tea."

For awhile conversation languished. Phyllis looked a little anxiously from time to time towards a bend in the drive where she expected her uncle to appear. Entertaining a gentleman alone was something of a tax. She was not used to it, and so far she and the baronet seemed to have been talking at cross-purposes.

Presently he said, apropos of nothing in particular: "I wonder you don't get a little runabout car, Phyllis. You go into town so often that you would find it awfully convenient."

"I intend to get one directly I come of age," she answered.

The Snare of the Fowler 45

"You ought to have one now," he protested. "You would find running about the country and seeing things lots more interesting than reading a lot of dryas dust books."

"Perhaps. But, you see, uncle says that the allowance for running the house and keeping me in frocks won't run to motor-cars."

"I expect that is all fiddle-de-dee," he laughed. "Anyhow, when you do buy one you had better let me help you choose it. There are a lot of sharks in the motor-car business. I know because I have proved it. Unless a man understands cars he may be cheated all ends up. I was completely bamboozled over the first car I bought. However, they didn't do me a second time. I flatter myself that I know all about a car that there is to be known. So if you will let me help you——"

"Oh, I should be grateful if you would," she said eagerly. "It is kind of you to offer——"

"Nothing of the sort. Just neighbourly," he said, with a smile. "But you will have to learn to drive first. . . . Unless you mean to keep a 'shover.'"

"Oh no. I want to drive myself."

The baronet drew his forehead into vertical lines and nibbled at a piece of bread and butter. "I don't see how it is to be done," he said presently. "There's nobody hereabouts who teaches motor-driving."

"But surely I could find out by myself, Sir John. It can't be very difficult."

He shook his head slowly. "Not to be thought of, little girl. . . . Quite impossible. . . . And with a new car . . ."

"But other people learn. Lots of girls drive cars nowadays. . . ."

"After they have had lessons : yes. Cars are tricky things. . . . Let me think."

For several moments he remained silent, apparently in deep thought. Then his face brightened. "Look here, Phyllis, why not let me teach you? I think I could manage it. Wednesday is generally a fairly free day with me. Come along in my car for a few runs, and I can put you up to all the tricks."

"Are you sure you can spare the time?" she questioned eagerly.

"Oh yes, I think so," he said, still frowning. "Oh yes, I could manage it quite easily. What do you say to having your first lesson next Wednesday afternoon?"

"I should love it," she answered impulsively.

"Then that's settled. Let's say three o'clock sharp."

"I'll be ready," she said, her eyes dancing. "You *are* good, Sir John. But here comes uncle. Don't mention cars to him, please ; he hates them."

"Right-ho!" and he reached out his hand and took another slice of bread and butter.

Daniel Teague walked slowly across the lawn, carrying his hat in his hand. The walk from St. Runton in the boiling sun had made him perspire.

On catching sight of Phyllis and Sir John in the shade of the copper beech his eyes grew troubled. The irony of the situation was becoming daily more bitter.

"The brute is losing no time," he reflected miserably, "and seems to be making headway, too."

With an effort he pulled himself together. He'd got to see the thing through. . . . Face it out. . . . Make the best of it. . . . On the whole, it was better that the fellow should win her consent by fair means than that he should resort to any of his tricks. He knew the man. He would stick at nothing.

The Snare of the Fowler 47

"'Afternoon, Teague," said the baronet genially, munching the while his bread and butter.

"'Afternoon, Sir John," the lawyer replied with a wintry smile. "You and Phyl seem to be enjoying yourselves."

"Rather. Your niece and I have been settling the affairs of the nation."

"Found it easy, no doubt." There was bitterness in his tone which Phyllis failed to notice, but which was obvious to the baronet, and he grinned maliciously.

'Lijah came forward with a fresh pot of tea. "Saw you coming, sir," he explained, nodding to the lawyer. "I know you like your tea freshly brewed."

"Quite right, Martin."

"You look hot, uncle," Phyllis said sympathetically.

"I am hot, dear. And as dry as a lime-kiln."

"I might have fetched you with the car if I had thought of it," Sir John said genially.

Daniel flung a swift glance at him, then lowered his eyes. "Thanks," he replied. "I prefer walking. It is about the only exercise I get."

After that conversation became spasmodic, and finally tapered out into silence. Sir John rose and stretched himself, then looked at the sky. The silence was becoming a little strained.

"I think it is about time I was making tracks for Polgrain," he said, "or mother will be wondering what has become of me."

"But she knows where you are," Phyllis replied.

"That's so, but she would hardly expect me to stay to tea."

"Why not? You would have stayed if she had come with you."

"Most certainly," he laughed; "that is, if you had invited me."

Phyllis frowned and rose to her feet. "Please convey my regrets to Lady Tresize. I hope she will soon be all right again."

Daniel rose also and wiped his mouth with his napkin, and together they proceeded to the car, Phyllis walking between the two men.

When Sir John had disappeared round the bend, the two of them returned again to the tea-table. By this time the trees were flinging long shadows across the lawn and the faintest whisper of a breeze began to rustle in the tree-tops.

"The squire appears to have been making himself agreeable," Daniel remarked casually.

"Quite agreeable," she laughed. "He certainly is a much pleasanter man than he looks."

"He need be," Daniel grunted.

"You are great friends, are you not?"

"Oh yes, in a way. Chiefly in business matters, you know."

"Do you think he is clever?"

"In some things. Why?"

"Well, he did not strike me as being particularly well informed."

"Well, he isn't bookish, if that is what you mean. He is rather a man of action. Some men are like that, you know."

"What does he do?"

"Oh, well, he's a Justice of the Peace, you know, and Chairman of the Local Board, and Master of Hounds, and I don't know what else. And then, of course, he has a big estate to look after."

"Is he a good landlord?"

"Well, I believe he gets all he can out of his tenants."

"Yes, he would do that, I am sure."

Daniel ached to tell her the kind of man he was, and put her on her guard, but his tongue was tied. He wondered if there was another man in the country in as desperate and despicable position as he.

Meanwhile Sir John was driving homeward in a very cheerful frame of mind. He drove slowly, for his mind was occupied with other things than his car. He flattered himself that he had done what he called a good stroke of business. Phyllis, to all intents and purposes, had delivered herself into his hands. Getting her consent to allow him to give her lessons in driving he considered a master-stroke. He still had hopes that she would yield to his wooing. She was so utterly charming that he wanted her to come to him of her own free will. Never had he been so completely and desperately in love before. He almost ached to get possession of her—and of course he would get possession sooner or later, but would she come willingly, freely, gladly?—that was what he wanted. He hoped she would—he really did. He was quite sincere in that. But in any case she would have to come.

CHAPTER V

TRAPPED

THE next few weeks passed swiftly and pleasantly. The burst of summer weather did not long continue—nobody expected it would—but the warm rain that followed softened the buds and quickened the bursting life of the flowers, the trees unfolded their leaves as if by magic, and all the countryside became bathed in tenderest green.

Sir John found numerous excuses for calling at Pendare. He brought his mother one afternoon, and of course remained with her to tea. A few days later he came to make inquiries for a friend of his about a school at Eastbourne. Later he came to borrow a book that Phyllis had talked about and which he wanted to read. One evening he called after dinner, ostensibly to see Daniel Teague, and managed somehow to spend an hour in Phyllis's company. Also he called one afternoon with his car and fetched her to Polgrain to see Lady Tresize, and of course motored her back to Pendare after the visit. Twice he met her—quite accidentally—in St. Runton, and insisted on walking home with her, and on two occasions he had taken her out in his car for the purpose of giving her lessons in motor-driving.

On the whole he felt quite satisfied with the progress he had made. Phyllis had accepted him as a friend and appeared to trust him implicitly. Moreover, she was

grateful to him, and gratitude, he knew, was often the stepping-stone to a warmer feeling.

He sometimes wondered whether she suspected what was in his mind. He was disposed to think she did. Girls, he told himself, were not the innocent, unsophisticated creatures that people sometimes imagined them. Phyl had not spent five years at school and mixed with other girls for nothing. She was not an Early Victorian. She was quite modern and up-to-date. Also she was naturally alert and wide-awake.

Nevertheless, he played his part with great circumspection. He was kind but never effusive, friendly but never familiar. He might have been her uncle or distant cousin, and she accepted him for what he pretended to be—a friendly and considerate neighbour.

One afternoon he took his courage in both hands and boldly proposed to her. They were walking back from St. Runton at the time and the road was empty. Phyllis was so utterly amazed that for several moments she was dumbfounded. When at length she was able to find words she could only say :

“ Surely, Sir John, you must be joking.”

“ Joking ! ” he echoed. “ I tell you, Phyllis, I was never more serious in my life. Mother has been anxious for me to get married for years, but I have never seen any other girl that I wanted to marry. You would make just the wife I want, and I love you down to the ground. I do, indeed. It is you or nobody. If I can’t marry you I won’t marry anybody else.”

“ Then I am afraid, Sir John ”—she laughed nervously—“ that you will have to remain a bachelor.”

“ No, no, Phyllis ! ” he pleaded, “ don’t say that. You see, I don’t want to remain a bachelor any longer. I know mother is right. It is quite time I settled down.

I *want* to settle down, and I want you. You must have seen what I have been after for weeks past. I love the very ground you walk on."

"Oh! please, Sir John, don't say foolish things," she protested. "You are too old to be sentimental."

She did not see the angry flush that rose to his freckled face. She was anxious to treat the matter as lightly as possible. She could not bring herself to believe that this hard-faced man was really in love.

He curbed his anger in a moment. He knew that it would be fatal to show temper. "I am only thirty-five, Phyllis," he said pleadingly; "that is not old, surely. And yet old enough to know my own mind; old enough not to be carried away by a fancy. A man ought to be older than his wife. You are twenty-one—quite old enough to get married."

"But I don't want to get married," she answered with spirit. "Why should I? I want to remain as I am for years and years. I am only just beginning to enjoy life and appreciate the beauty of the world."

"Oh, that is all very well as far as it goes," he said humbly. "And believe me, Phyllis, I don't want to lessen your enjoyment, but to increase it. I believe I could make you happier than you have ever been. You can't remain single all the days of your life. You must marry some day——"

"I don't see any 'must' in the case," she broke in. "Thousands of girls don't marry——"

"They would if they had the chance," he interjected. "They don't marry because there are not men enough to go round——"

"Oh, that is not the only reason," she protested warmly. "Girls are not so dependent as they used to be. Why should I tie myself up to any man?"

"I admit that in your case there is no economic reason," he said despondently. "And of course I shouldn't ask you only I am so desperately in love with you. It's just that that makes all the difference. Believe me, little girl, I am staking all my happiness on you. It's not a boy's passing fancy with me, but a man's settled love——"

"If you mean that, Sir John," she replied after a moment's pause, "then all I can say is that I am sorry, very sorry. I had no idea . . . It never occurred to me——"

"Do you mean to tell me that you never guessed what I was after?"

"Of course I never guessed. It seemed to me that you were just a good friend, and now you have spoiled everything."

"No, no! not spoiled," he pleaded. "I am your friend whatever happens—shall always be your friend. There is nothing on earth that is humanly possible that I would not do for you. But I wanted to be something more than a mere friend. Won't you think better of it, Phyllis? Won't you give me a chance? You can take all the time you need to think it over."

"If I were to think it over for a year, Sir John," she said seriously, "it would make no difference. Don't think I am insensible of the compliment you have paid me, but I couldn't marry you—I couldn't really—now or ever."

"But why, Phyllis? Have you something against me? Or do you dislike me so very much?"

"I haven't anything against you, Sir John. You have been a very good friend, and I am grateful to you. . . . If we could only leave it at that."

"It is very hard for me to leave it at that," he said,

with a pathetic tremor in his voice. "I have loved you so long—so passionately. I have built so much on it. Dreamed of you almost night and day. Oh, Phyllis, Phyllis——" his voice ended almost in a wail.

She was startled and a little alarmed. She had never seen a man so broken by emotion before. She was afraid that he was going to shed tears, and being naturally generous and tender-hearted, she dreaded lest her sympathies should run away with her. Fortunately her common sense came to her rescue, also her sense of humour. It seemed ridiculous that this big, hulking man should be broken up by emotion just because she refused to marry him. That he might be disappointed she could well understand. Men of his type did not like being thwarted; perhaps also he was a little humiliated. He was so used to having his own way, that a refusal would touch him on the raw; but that his affections were greatly involved she could not bring herself to believe.

Still, he was no doubt hurt, and she felt anxious to lighten the blow as much as possible. His friendship would be much better than his enmity. If she could keep him as a friend it would be all to the good.

"I really am not worth worrying about, Sir John," she said lightly. "Let us try and forget all about it and go on just as we were before."

They had reached the house by this time and were standing face to face. She was anxious to put an end to the interview and was determined not to invite him to stay to tea.

He stood with bent head and eyes upon the ground, a picture of utter despondency.

"You are worth everything, Phyllis . . . everything," he said, after a long pause. "Still, if this is your

final word, I hope I know how to take a beating," and he heaved a tremendous sigh.

"Please don't talk about a beating." She laughed a little nervously. "We haven't been fighting, have we?"

"No, no! I didn't mean that. You think we might be friends still?"

"If you wish it."

"I do wish it, Phyllis. If I can't have the best, I would like to keep the second best. You don't want the driving lessons to end?"

"That is for you to decide. If you would rather not take me out again——"

He pulled himself together by what seemed a tremendous effort. "We'll go on, Phyllis, until you are quite proficient," he said. Then he raised his head suddenly and his lips twisted into the semblance of a smile. "He's a poor sort of workman, little girl, who downs tools in the middle of his job. I'll be round again on Wednesday."

She watched him as he walked away with hunched shoulders and bent head, and wondered for a moment whether he was as greatly distressed as he appeared to be. Then she turned into the house and went at once to her own room. She felt spent and exhausted. The interview had taken more out of her than she knew. It was her first experience of the kind and she did not want to have it repeated. There was no thrill of triumph in having made a conquest. The whole thing seemed to her a little humiliating.

She was not in an entirely happy frame of mind when Sir John drove up on the following Wednesday afternoon. She tried to put out of her mind what had passed between them at their last meeting, but it was not easy. She hoped that he would not allude to the matter. If

he did it would be the last of her motor-rides with him.

He smiled into her eyes when they shook hands and appeared to be quite cheerful.

"You'd better put on a warm coat," he said, "for there is very little sun to-day." His manner was business-like and free from all sentimentality.

She ran into the house and quickly reappeared enveloped in a white sports coat that reached almost to her heels.

"That's better," he said, and set the engine purring. She stepped in beside him without a word.

"You understand how to put in the clutch?" he questioned, with his hand on the lever.

"Oh yes, I understand that quite well."

"Here goes, then," and with a slight jerk the car was off.

Betty, who had been standing in the hall, turned back into the kitchen.

"I don't like that man, 'Lijah," she said sententiously.

"What man, Betty?"

"That Sir John Tresize. She's gone off with him again in his motor-car."

"Well. He's larning 'er how to drive, isn't he?"

"Larning her fiddlesticks. I hope the dear cheeld won't be a gettin' to like him."

"And s'pose she do? He's a good catch, ain't he? Polgrain ain't a place to be sneezed at."

"I'd rather see her buried," Betty snapped.

"An' you so terrible fond of 'er?"

"That's just it," and Betty wiped her eyes with her apron. "I love her like my own life, an' better. She's the sweetest thing I ever cuddled and cared for, but

that man, if he had 'er, would break 'er heart in a month. You've only to look at his face to see the sort of man he is."

"Why, what's amiss with his face, Betty?" 'Lijah questioned in surprise.

"Everything," Betty snapped. "The eyes of 'im. The mouth of 'im. The big jowl of 'im. I tell 'ee what, 'Lijah, he makes me feel creepy all over. I wonder the dear cheeld don't see it."

"You shouldn't jedge people by their looks," 'Lijah remarked, and went off into his pantry.

Meanwhile the motorists had crossed the downs and had descended to the old coach—or turnpike—road. Here Sir John slowed down.

"Now you can take my place and give her her head," he said quietly.

Phyllis slipped easily into the driver's seat and took the wheel.

"Keep your foot on the accelerator and let her rip if you like. There's very little traffic and we can see well ahead."

"You are not afraid of my going too fast?" she questioned.

"I'll keep my eye on you," he laughed, "and look out for pickets and police-traps at the same time."

Phyllis was only too glad to do what she was told, and soon the hedges were slipping past like an unbroken stream. The excitement of the pace got into her blood. The sense of power thrilled her. The purring of the engine was music. It was more: it was the vocal expression of an energy which she could not measure. It was tremendous: and yet it was under her direction and control. She felt thrilled, intoxicated.

Tresize looked at her from time to time. Her eyes

were sparkling, her cheeks aglow, her parted lips showed her white, even teeth, one tiny ear was being whipped by a strand of gold-brown hair.

The beast in the man gleamed in his small pig-like eyes, his mouth broadened into a triumphant smile.

Phyllis never looked at him. For the time being she was unconscious of his presence, unconscious of the flight of time, unconscious of everything save the thrill of this swift rush between the flowering hedges.

But all thrills exhaust themselves sooner or later. After awhile she became conscious that her arms were beginning to ache slightly, and that the excitement was dying out of her blood. She looked at the clock. It was still early. She was not aware that Tresize had managed to put the hands back when they changed places. How far they had come she could not guess. The neighbourhood was quite unfamiliar.

She lifted her foot from the accelerator and slowed down the car. "Don't you think we had better turn back now?" she questioned.

"As you like, Phyllis. I am in your hands," he replied, with a smile.

"I promised Betty I would be home early," she said thoughtfully, "but I am enjoying it. Don't you think I have done well?" and she turned to him a happy, smiling face.

"Splendidly," he answered promptly. "Suppose we go home another way. It will save turning round, and it will be a change of scene."

"Oh, that would be fine," and her eyes sparkled. "You know the way, of course?"

"Every yard of it," he laughed. "Take the turn to the right we are just coming to. The roads are narrower but quite good."

She turned the corner cautiously and then put on speed again.

It was a typical Cornish road. It twisted about in all directions, whilst tall hazel-grown hedges shut out nearly every glimpse of the surrounding country. Phyllis had grown confident and kept up the speed. They descended into a shallow valley, crossed a stream by a humped bridge, hooted their way through a tiny village, and then began to ascend the opposite hill. He showed her how to change gear, and she managed it with complete success. Still on and on and on. Back to the old gear again. The engine purred delightfully. The hedges streamed past. They came out into another broad thoroughfare, as wide and smooth as the turnpike they had left.

They had turned and twisted so often that Phyllis had lost all sense of direction as well as all count of time. The clock appeared to have stopped.

"You are quite certain you know the way?" she questioned, with a gay laugh.

"Quite certain."

The car continued to eat up the road mile after mile.

"We ought to be nearing home now," she said at length, "but I don't recognise any landmark."

"That long hill delayed us a little," he said quietly. "Let her rip."

The hedges streamed past again. She thought she caught a glimpse of a church-tower among the trees in the distance, but the country was still strange to her. They were panting up a steady incline.

Then a sharp report, as though someone had fired a gun close behind them.

"Pull up!" he said, with an oath, then begged her pardon. "A puncture, I expect," he added, and got out and walked round behind the car. Then he came

round on her side and raised the bonnet and examined the engine.

"Blow!" he exclaimed, and began to scratch his head.

"What's the matter?" she asked, consternation in her eyes.

He did not reply for a moment or two. Then he turned to her a smiling face.

"It'll mean a few minutes' delay," he said, "but there's a place down the lane here where we will soon get it put right."

She got from behind the steering-wheel and he took her place. They moved slowly and the engine kept missing fire.

"Is it a serious breakdown, do you think?" she questioned anxiously.

"Oh, I hope not," he laughed, "but we'll soon know. Dick Jory is quite a mechanic in his way."

The lane was narrow, with a plantation of firs on the right and a tall hedge on the left. It seemed to Phyllis a frightfully lonely place.

They pulled up at length before a solitary cottage. On the opposite side of the road was a wooden shanty, and on the garden gate was hung a small board on which was painted :

TEA AND HOT WATER

PROVIDED.

Behind the garden was an orchard. The lane seemed to lead nowhere in particular. Phyllis felt as though she had reached the end of the world.

Mrs. Jory came to the garden gate and greeted Sir John. She showed no surprise.

"Could you give the young lady a cup of tea, do you think?" he questioned. "Tyre burst just at the end of the lane. Is your husband about?"

"In the shop there," she said. Then she turned to Phyllis. "Come this way, miss. You'll be glad of a rest and a cup of warm tea."

Phyllis took a dislike to the woman from the start. She had eyes like a fish and a mouth like a frog.

She was shown into a clean and comfortably-furnished parlour. The table was already set for tea.

"Now take off your coat and hat, miss, and make yourself comfortable. Those breakdowns take time, you know."

Phyllis resented the woman's air of assurance, her slight familiarity, her assumption of knowing. They might have been expected.

"Thank you, I'll keep my things on," she said. For some reason she could not define, she began to feel uncomfortable.

"As you like, miss," the woman answered.

"We seem to have broken down at a convenient place"—Phyllis tried to smile. "What is the town we were nearing?"

"Trevear, miss. Half a mile on or so."

"Oh yes. Of course."

"Now I'll run into the kitchen and put on the kettle."

Phyllis dropped into a chair and gasped. For a moment she thought she would faint. The truth came to her with the swiftness of a flash of lightning. Had she seen it written on the wall or had some voice spoken in her ear she could not have been more certain.

She had been decoyed, lied to, hoodwinked, trapped. And as far as she could see there was no possible way of escape.

CHAPTER VI

ANXIETY

DANIEL TEAGUE returned in time for tea that afternoon. There was not much work in the office. Moreover, he felt so miserable and depressed that he was unable to concentrate his mind on anything. It required considerable effort to resist the lure of the Red Lion, but he managed it and felt agreeably virtuous in consequence.

When he reached the bend of the drive he looked for Phyllis. He expected to find her in the garden.

"Visitors, perhaps," he reflected, and slackened his pace a little.

'Lijah opened the door and stood aside for him to enter.

"Where's Miss Phyllis?" he demanded abruptly.

"She's gone for a motor ride with Sir John, sir."

"What?" the question burst from him like a pistol-shot.

"Yas, sir. This is the third time she's gone. He's larnin' 'er 'ow to drive."

"But I have been told nothing of this," he said, with an assumption of authority.

"Miss Phyllis know'd as 'ow you didn't like motors, sir."

"Well, I don't," he snapped. "How long have they been gone?"

"Quite a little time now, sir. Miss Phyllis had a hearly cup before she started. . . . You will have your tea at once, sir?"

“ Well, yes. But if I had known——” He strode off to the library, leaving the sentence unfinished.

After tea he put on his hat and went for a stroll. He felt restless and ill at ease. Phyllis’s absence worried him. He turned first in the direction of the empty stables and coach-house. Turk came out of his kennel and sidled toward him to the length of his chain.

Turk was a bull-pup which Phyllis had reared, and which was now almost full grown. Betty said that he was the ugliest brute she had ever set eyes on ; but that, of course, was all a matter of taste. Phyllis said that he was beautiful—a view shared to some extent by Elijah. His forelegs were wide apart and he had an enormous chest. His black nose seemed to have been pushed back unnecessarily, and a less aggressive under-jaw might have added to his beauty. No one could have said that his expression was amiable ; yet he was a most affectionate animal, and as gentle as a kitten with those who happened to take his fancy. He did not, however, make friends easily, and for some people he manifested a marked antipathy. During the day he was generally chained to his kennel, but at night he slept in a straw-lined basket in the hall, except when his fancy led him to the mat outside Phyllis’s bedroom door.

This afternoon he appeared anxious to make friends with Daniel, which was something unusual. Daniel was not a great lover of animals at any time.

“ Well, Turk,” Daniel said indifferently, “ hungry, eh ? ”

Turk looked up with big inquiring eyes and snorted.

“ You ought to have gone with your mistress, old man,” Daniel went on. “ She ought to have taken you, eh ? ”

Turk grinned approval and gave a short bark.

"I don't altogether like it," Daniel continued. "Your mistress is a good deal too trusting. I dare say it is all right, but all the same I don't feel quite easy in my mind."

Turk scratched his left ear with his hind-paw and growled something under his breath.

"I wish you had been with her, old man," Daniel concluded, and turned off into the kitchen-garden. For a while he talked to Israel Blight about peas, and carrots, and spring onions. He knew nothing about gardening himself, and took no interest in either fruit or vegetables until they were placed before him at meal-times. It was not often he spoke to Israel, or to Tommy Johns, the boy, but this afternoon it was a relief to talk to anyone. He wanted distraction from his thoughts. Israel discoursed learnedly on "savoy's" and what he called "sparrow-grass"; about scarlet-runners, and vegetable marrows, and broccoli. Daniel asked a number of questions, and showed more interest in the kitchen-garden than he had ever shown before.

He turned away at length and retraced his steps to the house.

"Has Miss Phyllis returned yet?" was his first question to 'Lijah.

"No. Not yet, sir. . . . My Betty is gettin' a bit worried about her."

"Why worried?"

"That's what I do say, sir. But there you be. Women is curious crithers."

"No doubt. No doubt. . . . I don't profess to understand 'em myself. But what is there to be worried about?"

"Exactly, sir. I said that same thing to 'er. But there 'tes. You see——" 'Lijah went to the door and looked along the drive.

" See what, Martin ? "

" Well, sir, 'tes this way. My missus—if you'll excuse me sayin' so—don't like that there Sir John."

" Don't like him ? "

" Women's prejerdice, no doubt, sir : but there 'tes. You caan't reason with 'em."

" No, I suppose not," and Daniel replaced his hat and strode out of the house again. He walked along the drive as far as the gates and stood for some moments as if listening, then slowly retraced his steps.

He knew what was troubling him, but did not like to shape the thought into words.

" She'll turn up all right," he kept saying to himself. " She's been out with him before, and bad as the fellow is, he wouldn't dare——"

But in his heart he knew that Tresize would dare anything—that he would not hesitate to hold her prisoner, if he got the chance, until he had got her promise. Men of his type thought of nothing but getting their own way. He would argue that " all was fair in love and war," and if Phyllis had refused him——

He wondered if she had. It was quite possible, of course. Tresize, he knew, was in a desperate hurry. When he set his mind on a thing he wanted it at once. He was always impatient of delays.

Daniel took off his hat and wiped his moist forehead. An unmistakable dread was growing upon him. How swiftly the harvest of his wrongdoing had ripened ! What a weak fool and coward he had been ! To put himself under the thumb of Tresize, of all men. Of course, he never dreamed that he would want his mortgage loan back, and who would have imagined that he would have gone to look up the property himself ?

Daniel groaned aloud. The thought that the bogus

deed was destroyed comforted him a little—but not much. He was still under the baronet's thumb. Sir John could still ruin him financially and from a professional point of view; but the most torturing thought of all was that little Phyl might be suffering for his transgression.

Six o'clock came and went. Daniel sat in the hall looking out of the window. The house seemed strangely silent. Nothing stirred. He could almost hear his heart-beats as the moments passed. Out on the lawn the shadows were lengthening steadily. The trees seemed listening for the sound of wheels. The silence was becoming oppressive.

Then a door clicked and he turned to see Betty advancing toward him. Her homely face was drawn as if in pain, her eyes were full of tears, her lips trembled. "Oh, Mr. Teague," she said, "can't nothing be done?"

"Done?" he questioned abruptly.

"Something's 'appened," she faltered. "I'm sure of it. I feel it in my bones; my innards are all of a tremble. I didn't want the tender dear to go, but what could I say? I misdoubt that man, Mr. Teague——"

"Why, Betty? He's a careful driver."

"'Tain't his drivin' I'm thinkin' of. He ain't a good man, Mr. Teague. I'm sure of it, and he wants our little maid. I've seen it for weeks past. He'll try to force her to marry him, or I'm mistook, and I believe he's took 'er off for that same purpose."

Daniel was silent for several moments. "Has she said anything to you?" he questioned presently.

"No, sir, but I'm a woman, and I've got eyes."

"Don't you think Miss Phyllis may be trusted to look after herself?" he asked, after a pause.

“ In most things, sir. But the dear cheeld is too believin’. She’s so good ’erself that she trusts nearly everybody. I’m nearly skeared out of my life for her.”

“ I confess I’m getting a bit anxious myself,” Daniel admitted ; “ but what can we do ? We can’t go in search of them. We haven’t the remotest idea which way they have gone. We’re perfectly helpless. There is nothing for it but to wait. Perhaps the engine has broken down and they’ve been delayed.”

“ Oh dear. My innards are like a churn,” and Betty retreated again to the kitchen wiping her eyes.

Seven o’clock came and dinner was ready to be served. Daniel still sat with his elbow on the window-ledge, staring out across the lawn and listening intently for the sound of wheels. The sun was getting low in the west and the greater part of the lawn lay in shadow. The clouds that had obscured the sky earlier in the afternoon had all departed and the long June day was slowly fading in a mist of gold.

“ Shall I serve dinner, sir, or will you wait a bit longer for Miss Phyllis ? ” It was ’Lijah who spoke.

Daniel started but did not turn his head. He had no expectation of Phyllis returning for dinner. With the passing of the hours his despondency had increased, and his remorse had grown to be almost unbearable.

“ Better serve it at once, Martin,” he said, in a voice that shook in spite of himself. “ I see no use waiting.”

“ Yes, sir,” and ’Lijah disappeared.

Daniel walked slowly into the dining-room and took his solitary place at the head of the table. Dinner was going to be a ghastly farce, he knew, but he would have to go through with it. It wouldn’t do to let Martin and the others see how much he was suffering. He considered it undignified to show weakness before servants.

He managed the soup successfully, but when it came to the joint he felt as if every mouthful would choke him. He tried his hardest, but it was not a bit of use, it seemed as though his heart kept rising into his throat. If he could only forget. Sweep his mind clear of thoughts as the sky had been swept of clouds, bury in oblivion the record of his weakness and shame, he might still be a happy man. But, alas ! there was no forgetting. . . .

He rose hastily from his chair and flung his napkin on to the table. "I've no appetite, Martin," he said irritably. "You need not bring the sweets. I'm going into the library for a smoke. Bring me a tumbler and a jug of water," and he walked hurriedly out of the room.

The library faced the west and was full of yellow light. The sun had disappeared behind the trees, but the sky above glowed like burnished gold. Throwing himself into an easy-chair, he began to fill his pipe. 'Lijah followed a few minutes later with a carafe of water and a tumbler.

"Anything else, sir ?" 'Lijah questioned in a low voice.

"No, thank you, Martin : except you can inform me the moment Miss Phyllis turns up."

"You think she will turn up, sir ?"

"Of course she will turn up ; or at least we shall get news of her. She may be very late. Those dreadful machines, if they break down there's no knowing when they will be put right again."

"Betty's got into a terrible tantrum," 'Lijah remarked. "There's no pacifying 'er."

"Getting into a tantrum will do no good," Daniel said, putting on for a moment a judicial air. "Tell her from me not to be foolish."

"Yes, sir," and 'Lijah took his departure, closing the door softly behind him.

Daniel jumped up at once and, unlocking a cabinet, took therefrom a bottle of spirits. No one but Daniel knew of that bottle. He kept it in case of emergencies, he told himself. Now an emergency had arisen. He would have to fortify himself or he would go all to pieces. He felt as if he could not endure the suspense much longer, and what was even worse than the suspense was the remorse, that like a poisoned tooth was gnawing at his vitals. He wondered if there could be a worse hell than the one in which he found himself—a hell he had dug for himself, and with his own hands had lighted the fire.

By the time he had swallowed two stiff pegs he began to feel better; a third restored him to comparative cheerfulness. He began to marshal the old sophistries with which he had tried to delude himself in the past. As the wife of Sir John, Phyllis would have a great position, and after all position was what most girls thought of. It might not appeal to her now, but she would value it later on. When she heard herself addressed as "Lady Tresize" she would feel as proud as a peacock, and he as her uncle would share in her glory—no longer with a millstone of debt about his neck and financial disaster staring him in the face, but with an assured position in the county, and plenty of money in his pocket.

The world began to look so rosy, that he poured himself out another peg. He ought to have fortified himself sooner. He had suffered hours of agony for nothing. What was the use of worrying about a girl even though she was his own niece? Everything would be right in the end. Phyl would have such a splendid

wedding, that every other girl in the neighbourhood would be green with envy. He began to talk to himself—to see double. There were two bottles on the table and two tumblers. A look of cunning came into his eyes. Martin was not to know, or he might be indulging himself.

He rose slowly to his feet, seized the bottle with unsteady hand and put it back into the cabinet.

“Not for you, Martin, my boy,” he muttered thickly. “This is drink for a gentleman.” And he staggered back to his chair and five minutes later was fast asleep.

Meanwhile Elijah had brought Turk into the house and fixed his bed for the night, but Turk refused to look at the basket. He sniffed at the door of the library, and then made a tour of the dining- and drawing-rooms. Not finding what he wanted, he bolted upstairs, and finding Phyllis’s bedroom door open, he jumped on to the bed, and stared with inquiring eyes at the pillows. Then he trotted downstairs and made for the servants’ hall.

Betty was seated on a low chair rocking herself to and fro, her face quivering with emotion. Turk looked at her for a moment or two, then, placing a forepaw on each of her knees, he looked inquiringly into her troubled eyes.

Betty gave a gasp and almost screamed, then suddenly recovered herself.

“Oh, you poor dear ugly brute,” she whimpered. “You miss her, do you? An’ you are askin’ where she is, and I caan’t tell ’ee. No, I caan’t tell ’ee. I wish I could. That black-’earted villain have run off with her——”

Turk gave a low growl, but continued to stare.

“ Now, I wonder if you understand what I’m saying, you poor ’eathen ? You’ve got a ’eart of gold, I’m sure, in spite of your ugly face, and if ever you do meet that wicked wretch, I hope you’ll let ’im know what I think of ’im.”

Turk gave a snort and made for the door, but the door was shut, so he gave a low growl and turned round and looked at Betty.

“ Now, I wonder what the poor dear ’eathen wants ? ” Betty soliloquised. There was no one in the room to whom she could talk. ’Lijah was in his pantry, and Lucy, the housemaid, was at St. Runton, it being her evening out.

“ Wants to go back to his kennel, p’raps,” Betty further reflected, and she rose and opened the door. Turk trotted out and Betty followed. The summer twilight lay soft and warm over all the countryside. Distant objects were becoming vague and obscure : nearly all sounds were hushed : the birds had ceased to sing ; only the leat in the glen continued its unending song.

Betty heaved a deep sigh and her eyes again filled with tears. Where could her darling be ? What evil had befallen her precious girl ?

Turk did not seek his kennel, but turned at once to the front of the house. For a while he stood still and pricked up his ears, then trotted away along the drive. Betty followed. She felt better out-of-doors than sitting alone in the house. At the bend of the drive Turk stopped and raised his head in a listening attitude.

“ Oh, you poor Christian ’eathen,” Betty sobbed. “ I believe your ’eart is breaking just as mine is. You know she is out there somewhere, and you are a-waitin’ for her and listenin’. Oh, Turk, Turk ! I’m afraid—

terribly afraid," and she raised her apron and wiped her eyes.

Turk gave a low growl and came and squatted by her side, and in the deep hush of the twilight they waited and listened.

CHAPTER VII

STRATEGY

WHEN Phyllis discovered that she was trapped, she might have done several things—she might have given way to panic, or yielded to hysteria, or denounced Sir John as a villain and coward, or tried to run away. But she did neither of these things. She was clear-eyed enough to see that neither of them would serve her purpose.

“I must keep my head whatever happens,” she said to herself. “And I must not let any one of them see that I am suspicious.”

Force, she realised, was of no use in a case like this : they were three to one. She was quite certain that she could not look for help either from Jory or his wife. Her only hope lay in pitting her wits against the three of them.

The whole thing had been cleverly managed. She had walked quite unsuspectingly into the snare. How easily she had been gulled : and she had prided herself on being modern and up-to-date.

She was not going to give way to despair, however. She would have to meet cunning with cunning, strategy with strategy. Sir John might think himself clever, but she flattered herself that she was as clever as he.

Mrs. Jory came back from the kitchen with a smirk on her face. “Kettle is nearly on the boil,” she said. “I’ll not keep you long waiting for your tea.”

"Oh, I am in no hurry," Phyllis smiled. "I had an early cup before we started. I suppose you know Sir John well?"

"Oh yes, we know him quite well."

"Awfully kind and generous, don't you think? He's teaching me how to drive, you know."

"Reely, now. Yes, he's a very kind gentleman."

"This is the first time we've had a puncture, or any trouble with the engine, and do you know, I was getting on splendidly. I wonder if the mischief will take long to repair?"

"There's no knowing, miss. Sometimes it takes hours and hours. But you'll be all right here, miss."

"Thank you so much, but I think I'll go out and inquire. I'd like to have some idea how long we are likely to be detained."

"Why, yes, of course, miss: that's quite natural."

Phyllis walked slowly out of the house and across the road. Jory, in his shirt-sleeves, was bending over the engine, though he did not appear to be doing anything. Sir John was looking on.

He glanced at Phyllis with a suspicious look, but she appeared quite unconcerned.

"Is it a bad breakdown, Sir John?" she inquired artlessly.

"I'm afraid it's rather bad," he answered, "and we are farther from home than I like. You see, we took a wrong turn somewhere, and I got a bit out of my reckoning."

"There were so many turns," she laughed, "that I don't wonder we took the wrong one in the end."

"That is so," he replied, in a tone of relief, "and yet I thought I knew my way all right."

"Well, anyhow, that can't be helped now," she

smiled. "Have you any idea how long it will be before we shall be able to start again."

"I'm afraid some considerable time," he said, in tones of apparent regret. Then he turned to the blacksmith: "What do you say, Jory? How long do you think it will be before we are ready to start?"

Jory raised his head and grinned. "Two hours at the very least, Sir John—very likely more."

Phyllis looked surprised and alarmed. "Two hours," she exclaimed. "Oh! that's dreadful. I shall have to send a wire to uncle at once, or he'll go off his head."

"Oh, not he," Sir John said sullenly. "He knows you are quite safe with me."

"Oh yes, he trusts you all right, but he'll think we have met with an accident and got killed or badly hurt; and then there's Betty. She'll be in hysterics unless I can relieve her mind."

"I don't think you need worry, Phyllis," he said soothingly.

"But I do worry, Sir John. Can't you write out a telegram?—you know better what to say than I do—and I'll take it to the post-office before I get tea."

"If you particularly wish it, of course," he replied, in a conciliatory tone, and he tore a leaf from his pocket book and began to write.

"You see, Sir John," she smiled, "I shall be able to get my tea in peace and comfort when I have despatched the telegram."

"That's all right," he said cheerfully. "How will this do?" and he read:

"Engine trouble. Greatly delayed. Very late back.—PHYLLIS."

"Oh, that will do splendidly. . . . It explains everything," she said cheerfully.

“All right, then,” and he gave her the paper. Then he beckoned to Mrs. Jory. “Show the young lady the way to the post-office, will you? And mind you don’t get lost.” And he laughed knowingly, and winked at the same time. He felt quite safe. Phyllis was evidently unsuspecting.

They made their way through the orchard at the back of the house, and then crossed two fields by a footpath and came out on the main road almost at the beginning of the town. It consisted in the main of one long street, which appeared to be a playground for children and a happy hunting-ground for cats and chickens.

“The post-office is at the far end, miss,” Mrs. Jory explained.

Phyllis did not reply. Her thoughts were too busy with other things. She had taken the first step successfully; but what might happen now she did not know. She was trusting to chance, to her own intuition, and to an overruling Providence. Mrs. Jory kept close to her elbow; clearly she was taking no risks.

Phyllis looked eagerly toward the narrow street. There might be a police-station into which she could run, or a policeman into whose arms she might throw herself, or she might meet someone she knew, or there might be an inn in which she could find shelter. On one thing she was determined, and that was to give Mrs. Jory the slip at the first opportunity. That done—well, anything might happen.

Coming carefully down the street was a two-seater motor-car, driven by a young man. He was driving slowly in order to avoid the children and the chickens, and tooting his horn all the time. Phyllis watched his approach indifferently. She was thinking of other things. Subconsciously her brain registered the facts

that the driver was alone and that he was a gentleman. These things, however, were no concern of hers. Her thoughts were engrossed with weightier matters. As the car drew nearer its speed increased. When within less than fifty-yards of her she sprang from the side of Mrs. Jory and ran into the middle of the road almost in front of the car. The driver put on the brakes instantly, but before the machine could be brought to a standstill she had leaped into the seat beside him.

“Drive like the wind,” she cried. “Quick—quick——” Her eyes were dilated, her breath came and went in gasps. “Don’t wait a moment,” she panted.

The driver was so bewildered—so completely taken by surprise—that he obeyed automatically. Down went his foot on the accelerator and the little car shot forward like a thing of life.

Phyllis turned and looked over her shoulder and saw Mrs. Jory standing on the side-walk with both arms outstretched and panic in her eyes—the next moment she started to run.

“Faster—faster !” Phyllis cried. “They’ll be after us in a few minutes. Oh !—oh——”

The young man at the wheel turned his head and regarded her for a moment with a puzzled look in his eyes, but he kept the engine going at full speed. He would have done so in any case now that he had left the town behind him—but what he could not understand was the presence of this girl with white, terror-stricken face and dilating eyes. What did it mean ? Who was she ? Where did she come from ? Where did she want to be taken ?

The whole affair had happened so suddenly and unexpectedly that he still felt bewildered. Was the girl mad or was she simply frightened out of her wits ? And

if the latter, what was there to frighten her? She had run out into the road as if she had meant suicide, and before he knew what had happened she was in the seat beside him urging him to drive like the wind.

She still kept looking back with fear in her eyes—but fear of what? Fear of whom? It was time for an explanation. He could not go on obeying a girl who might have escaped from a lunatic asylum. There was no knowing what she might demand next.

They had reached the foot of the long slope and the ground was beginning to rise again. The pace of the car slackened perceptibly.

She flashed her face toward him and he saw the gleam of her white teeth. “Oh, please don’t slow down,” she cried pitifully. “Please don’t . . . oh, please . . .”

He felt a sudden constriction in the region of his heart. She was so young—not more than seventeen, he thought—so evidently frightened at something, and she had thrown herself on his protection. It was essential that he should somehow get to the bottom of the affair. He wanted to protect her—to help her if possible—but he did not want to be mixed up in something that was no affair of his and that might get him into trouble.

“Look here,” he said, and his voice sounded stern, though he had meant it to be sympathetic. “What is it you are frightened of? and whom do you imagine is after you?”

“It is not imagination,” she panted. “When he discovers that I have eluded him—and he will have discovered before this—he will be after me like a shot.”

“Well, suppose he does come after you, what then? Do you belong to him? Are you his daughter?”

“Oh no, no. . . . I can’t explain very well. . . . He wants me to belong to him, do you understand? . . .

He got me away from home in his car by a trick.
. . . Oh ! Oh ! . . . ”

“ So he sort of kidnapped you, eh ? ” and a curious smile lighted up the young man’s face.

“ Something like that,” she faltered, and she turned her head and looked over her shoulder again. “ Of course, I ought not to have trusted him—I see that now.”

“ We often see things when it is too late,” he smiled “ But that by the way. What we have to consider now is the present and the future. If people see me tearing along in the car with you by my side they may think that I have kidnapped you,” and a low laugh escaped his lips.

“ Oh no, they won’t,” and she turned eager, trusting eyes on him and the glimmer of a smile played round her lips.

“ That means that you are not afraid of me ? ” he questioned.

“ I don’t think I am afraid of you,” she said slowly, and her smile became more pronounced.

“ You don’t think,” he chuckled quietly. “ Well, there is such a thing, you know, as getting from the frying-pan into the fire.”

“ I am sure I have not done that,” she replied.

“ Well, I hope not,” he smiled ; “ but you must remember that you know nothing about me. You don’t even know my name or where I live. And you must not forget, either, that you took possession of that seat without as much as a ‘ by your leave.’ ”

“ Oh yes, I know. . . . I hope you will forgive me, but I was desperate, and I was praying all the time that the good God would show me a way of escape, and then—Oh ! I don’t know how it happened. . . . I didn’t

think. There was your car and the empty seat, and I just went for it——”

“And the wonder is you didn’t break your neck,” he interjected; “but they do say there is a special Providence over drunken men and children.”

“Please don’t class me with drunken men,” she smiled.

“No, I class you among the children—you are not much more than a child, I take it. Anyhow, here you are——”

“I shall be twenty-one the week after next,” she protested a little indignantly.

“What? . . . Great Scot! . . . I beg your pardon, miss. I thought—but never mind that now. The question is what am I to do with you?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” she faltered, and a frightened look came into her eyes again. “Is there a railway-station anywhere near?”

“Not within miles, miss. And there are precious few trains either way at this hour of the day. May I be so bold as to ask where you live?”

“At Pendare, near St. Runton. Do you know it?”

“I know St. Runton, but that is thirty miles from here.”

“I know; that is what made me feel so lost and frightened.”

“I don’t wonder you felt lost,” he said musingly.

“Now, supposing that amiable individual of whom you spoke overtakes us—I don’t think he will, mind you—but in case he should, do you wish me to punch his head or what?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t mind if you killed him,” she said, with flashing eyes; “but you couldn’t do that. He is tremendously big and strong.”

“Well, I hope for his own sake that he does not put

himself in the way of getting killed," he smiled. "In the meanwhile I constitute myself your guardian. How will that suit? Do you think you can trust me?"

"I am sure I can," she said impulsively. "I do trust you. I know you will help me if you can."

"Thank you. You may rely on me for that. Now, you needn't worry to look back over your shoulder any more. I'm going to see you safe in your own home."

"Oh, how good of you!"

"But I cannot take you there direct," he went on. "I haven't petrol enough for one thing; for another, I shall have some patients waiting for me. You will understand from that that I am a doctor—with a large practice geographically—numerically necessarily small. I live at Redstone, and my name is Tresillian—Basil Tresillian. Now, if I am to see you to your home, you will understand that I shall have to take you to Redstone first. That will mean going a good many miles off the straight line. Still, we shall be nearer St. Runton there than we are at this point. How does that programme strike you?"

"Oh, I think you are splendid," she said impulsively. "I am sure God sent you to save me."

He ignored the praise, though it touched him curiously.

"Why, as to that," he smiled, "I happened at the time to be returning from seeing a patient."

"You do not believe, perhaps, that God answers our prayers?" she questioned.

He smiled again before answering: "Why, did I not say just now that the special Providence of which I spoke may have compelled you to attack my car?"

"But I did not attack your car," she laughed. "I simply hailed it in the friendliest way."

She was rapidly recovering from the nervous tension to which she had been subjected. They had left the main road and were threading their way through pleasant country lanes, skirting farmsteads, and occasionally moving cautiously through sleepy hamlets. She had no longer any fear of Tresize overtaking them. Even if he had started in pursuit, he would not know the way they had taken. Moreover, with this virile young doctor by her side she felt delightfully safe.

"Now, while I am filling the petrol-tank and attending to my patients," he went on, "I will hand you over to the care of my mother. She is one of the very best and I'm sure you will like her."

"If she is anything like you, I'm certain I shall," was the laughing answer.

"Well, then, I may tell you she is not a bit like me—not a bit. My mother is just great. If Christianity means being good, then you may bet that my mother is a Christian."

"And are you not a Christian?" she queried.

"I am a doctor," he answered, with perfect gravity. "My business is to heal people's bodies—that is, if I can."

"But people have souls as well as bodies," she replied, in a questioning tone.

"That may be," he smiled, "but their souls are out of my beat. That's parsons' work, and I'm bound to say I don't envy them their job."

"But it's very noble work, nevertheless," she retorted.

"Noble"—he smiled—"but tough."

She looked at him quizzically and frowned. She could not quite size him up. She was not sure whether he was slyly humorous, or whether he was ironical. Also she was intrigued by a slight American intonation.

She admitted to herself that she liked his face. She admired the line of his jaw, the cleft chin, the straight nose, the level brows, and the fine eyes. It was a face, somehow, that inspired trust. She would not be afraid to go with him anywhere.

She was contrasting him with Sir John Tresize when the car slowed down and came to a standstill.

"Here we are at last," he said cheerfully.

She saw, standing a little back from the road, a flat-fronted house, with a brick path to the door and a huge wisteria clinging to the wall and reaching almost to the roof. On the iron gate was a brass plate on which she read the name :

BASIL TRESILLIAN, M.D.

A little way ahead was the beginning of a narrow street, and rising above the house-tops was a square church-tower.

The door was opened by a trim maid in black, with white cuffs and cap and apron, and a moment later she was shown into a pleasant old-fashioned dining-room and found herself confronted by an old-fashioned lady with perfectly-white hair, and a long gold chain about her neck.

"Here, mother, I have brought a young lady to see you," said the cheery voice of the doctor. "Her car had broken down ; so I gave her a lift, and after she has had some tea I am taking her along to her home."

Phyllis felt her heart give a sudden throb of gratitude. How diplomatic he was ! With a sentence he had saved her from all explanations.

"Mother will look after you all right," he smiled, and then left the room.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRESILLIANS

TEN minutes later Phyllis, the doctor, and his mother were sitting down to a regulation Cornish tea. Gooseberry-tart and clotted cream, saffron cake, and a plentiful supply of home-baked bread and butter. Phyllis had taken off her sports coat and hat, washed the dust from her face, and straightened into some semblance of tidiness her wind-blown hair.

The doctor gave a little start at her changed appearance. She looked younger than ever. She was so slim, so boyish ; her skin so softly tinted, her face so piquant, her movements so free and untrammelled, that it seemed impossible to think of her as a full-grown woman.

Phyllis was a little bit troubled that she had only an ordinary skirt and blouse beneath her sports coat. Had she the smallest suspicion that she might be out to tea she would have worn something "decent." Like most ordinary healthy girls, she was particular about her clothes.

"My dear," said Mrs. Tresillian, when she came back into the room, "you look a perfect picture."

"A perfect sketch, you mean," was the laughing reply.

"No, child, you could not look a sketch if you tried ; but I am sure you will be ready for your tea."

"I am that. I am just ravenous. How good of you to take compassion on me in this way."

"Isn't there something in the Bible," laughed the doctor, who came in at that moment, "about entertaining angels unawares?"

"I believe there is," she parried, "but unfortunately it won't apply in this case. I'm terribly and hopelessly human."

"I have an impression that Eve was human before she raided the orchard," he remarked smilingly.

"But what after?" she quizzed.

"Still human," he laughed.

"But more human or less?"

"Ah, who can say?" he questioned, knitting his brows. "That is rather a fine point for the theologians. Is innocence, coupled with ignorance and inexperience, the ideal thing, or strength and sanity that come from knowledge? Personally I am inclined to vote for the latter."

"Oh, Basil," exclaimed his mother, "what will you be saying next? You are trying to make out that Eve was a finer woman after the fall than before."

"Am I?" he laughed. "I see I shall have to be careful what I say. Anyhow, mother, if you were as ignorant and innocent and inexperienced as Eve was before the fall, I don't think I should like you half as much as I do now."

"Oh, Basil, you are incorrigible," she protested.

"It is also evident," laughed Phyllis, "that he does not want to entertain angels."

"I might find them a bit dull," he answered.

"For which reason I presume you suggested that I might be one," she flung at him.

"Oh, come," he protested, "between the two of you I fear I haven't a chance."

"It was you who began it," she laughed.

"He is a perpetual tease, my dear," Mrs. Tresillian interposed. "You don't know him yet."

Phyllis felt that this was true. Perhaps it was one of the reasons why she found him so interesting. She did not know whether to take him seriously or not. Every now and then she glanced across at his lean, finely-chiselled face and wondered why an M.D. should stagnate in a little out-of-the-way place like Redstone. If she ever got to know him better she would feel strongly tempted to ask him. Would she ever know him better, or was this the beginning and end of their acquaintance?

Now and then, when she was talking to his mother or looking at her plate, she felt that his eyes were on her. They seemed to be boring into her brain. Was he appraising her? Weighing her in the balance of his own judgment? or was he already satisfied that she was a mere child—ignorant and inexperienced and not worthy of further consideration?

She did not intend, however, to be regarded merely as a child. She did not think that she was exactly an ignoramus. She had spent five years at school. She was a product of the twentieth century. Within a fortnight she would be her own mistress, and she had tried to fit herself for the position she would occupy. And yet this man had told her frankly that she was a child.

Was it because she had played the fool in allowing herself to be decoyed from home, and by a man that her own instincts should have told her was not to be trusted? At any rate, she would be very careful not to be fooled a second time. She had learnt a lesson that she would not be likely soon to forget.

When Tresillian had gone out to see his patients she found herself *tête-à-tête* with his mother. Mrs. Tresillian

was not inquisitive. She did not ask for any confidences. She scarcely asked a single direct question, and yet before their talk came to an end Phyllis had confided to her a good deal of her family history. Of Sir John Tresize she said nothing, nor did she let out the fact that she was heiress to considerable property ; but it did her good to talk to this gentle, motherly woman about her lonely childhood and girlhood ; about her life at school ; about her old nurse and housekeeper, Betty Martin ; about Turk, her bull-pup ; about her uncle Dan, with whom she lived ; about her mothers' meeting, and her work at the hospital ; about her rose-garden, which at this time was looking its best.

All this came out in bits and scraps, for Mrs. Tresillian seemed eager to talk about her son, and Phyllis was nothing loath to listen, for the young doctor had piqued her curiosity to an extraordinary degree.

" Basil settled down in Redstone for my sake," she confided to Phyllis. " At college he did brilliantly and won degree after degree. Soon after he was fully qualified—at the earnest request of his uncle—he went out to Canada, to one of those Western cities that was doubling its population every few years. It was a great opportunity for him. There was a big oil boom soon after he got there, and people poured into the city by the thousand. He was worked, dear boy, nearly off his feet, and of course he made money fast, which he invested in land in the oil zone. It may prove very valuable some day—I don't know. Then my husband died and I was left utterly alone. I have a son in London in business, but he has a large family, so has my daughter, who is married to a solicitor in Exeter.

" Well, directly Basil knew how I was situated, he flung up his work and all his prospects in Canada and

came straight home to look after me. From a worldly point of view he acted very foolishly, but he did not wait to consult me. Of course, it is a tremendous joy to have him here in the old home, and he makes my life just a psalm of praise and thanksgiving ; but don't you see, my dear, there is no scope for his talents in a place like this. He seems quite happy, however. He has plenty of time for research work. He is hunting germs all his spare time, and I believe has made some important discoveries. Now and then he goes up to London and reads papers before this learned society and that. I don't remember their names ; and he writes articles for the *Lancet* and the *B.M.J.*, as he calls it, so he is kept quite busy one way and another ; but, I feel, all the same, as though he were wasting his life, and all on my account."

" But if he is engaged in research work he cannot be wasting his life," Phyllis replied.

" It does not seem to lead anywhere, my dear," Mrs. Tresillian complained, " and I have a feeling that children should not be called upon to sacrifice so much for their parents."

" But why not ? " Phyllis questioned. " Parents make sacrifices for their children."

" That is different, my dear," Mrs. Tresillian answered, with a smile.

" Different ! Why different ? "

Mrs. Tresillian smiled again, and patted the back of Phyllis's hand with the tips of her thin fingers. " Parents are responsible for their children, my dear," she said slowly. " Children are not responsible for their parents—they did not choose them, they did not ask to be born."

Phyllis drew in her breath quickly and an almost startled look came into her eyes. " Oh ! but surely we

ought to be grateful that we are alive," she said earnestly. "Life is such a beautiful thing, and the world is such a beautiful place."

"For you, my child, yes, and for many others like you," was the quiet answer; "but for others—how many others?—born to poverty and want and suffering. Born to squalor and dirt and disease. Would it be surprising if they resented being born at all, and felt no gratitude?"

"But—but—surely God meant us all to be born," Phyllis said, with a little gasp.

"I wonder," the older woman questioned, with a dreamy look in her eyes. Then, after a pause: "When Basil was only a very little chap he used to say sometimes, 'Mammy, if I were not your little boy, whose little boy should I be?'"

"Why, I remember when I was little I used to ask the very same question," Phyllis laughed; and that led to further reminiscences of her childhood days.

Mrs. Tresillian soon brought the conversation back again to her son. It was a theme on which she loved to descant. It was evident that her whole life was bound up in him.

"I think sometimes that he is the best son a mother ever had," she said, with misty eyes. "And then, when I think of his gifts and talents, I feel that it is wrong that he should sacrifice so much on my account."

"But surely where there is love there is no sacrifice," Phyllis argued. "At least there is no consciousness of sacrifice. I expect you made lots of sacrifices for him and did not know that you made them."

"My child, you have some beautiful thoughts," the old lady answered, with a smile. "It is quite true: what you do for your children is a delight."

"And what your son does for you is, I expect, a joy to him. So why trouble?" Phyllis replied.

"My child, I am glad I have had this little talk with you. You are very understanding," and she patted the back of Phyllis's hand again. "Of course, I know that Basil is very fond of his old mother."

"I am sure he is. He told me on the way here that you were one of the best."

"It's just like him to say that," was the smiling reply. "I suppose he felt that you were not quite a stranger, though he had never seen you before."

"I don't know what *he* felt," Phyllis answered warmly. "I wish I could put into words what *I* felt and feel still. It seems to me as though he were sent direct from heaven."

And then the door opened and Tresillian came into the room with his overcoat buttoned to his chin and his driving-gloves in his hand.

"Now, Miss Dean, I am ready when you are," he said quietly.

"In two ticks," she answered brightly, and ran out of the room. She did not wait to see if she had pinned on her hat straight. Tresillian followed her into the hall and helped her on with her coat.

"You will come again, dearie?" were Mrs. Tresillian's parting words.

"At the very first opportunity," Phyllis answered, kissing her; and then she followed the doctor out of the house.

"I hope you won't hate me for all the trouble I am giving you," she said, as she took her seat by his side.

"I hope not," was the quiet answer, and then silence fell between them. They ran through the little town in a few minutes, and then breasted a steep hill by a zigzag

road, then out on a fairly wide plateau where running was easier. It was a cross-country journey to St. Runton, and some of the roads were not in the best state of repair, hence progress was comparatively slow.

Now that they had started again, Phyllis was impatient to get home. She knew that Betty would be in a dreadful state of anxiety, and she was afraid that her uncle would be angry since he had been kept in ignorance of these motor-rides. She tried her best not to think of that awful half-hour she spent at the cottage, but in spite of all her efforts it would obtrude itself. It was a memory she would carry with her to the end of her days. Whenever she thought of it a cold shiver ran down her spine.

The silence that had fallen between them was broken by the doctor.

"I hope your people will not be very anxious," he remarked quietly and without turning his head.

"I am afraid Betty will be in hysterics," she replied.

"And who might Betty be?"

"My old nurse and our present housekeeper."

"But your parents?" he questioned.

"They are both dead."

He turned his head suddenly. "Oh, I am sorry. Forgive me. I did not guess."

"How could you know?" she questioned. "I told your mother, of course. I think she is just lovely."

"Yes, mother is a dear." Then silence fell again.

The long summer day was fading slowly, softly, serenely. The cattle were lying about in the fields contentedly chewing their cuds. The birds had sought their nests and hushed their songs. The villages and hamlets through which they passed seem deserted, the children had finished their play, the chickens had gone to roost. Here and there a labourer sat outside his

cottage door quietly smoking. Now and then a bat zigzagged swiftly through the air without a sound.

"Of what are you thinking?" the doctor questioned at length, and he turned on her a pair of smiling eyes.

"Of the long, long way you will have to come back alone," she answered frankly.

"Don't worry about me," he said. "I'm used to it."

"That won't help, as far as I can see," she replied. "I feel an awful beast giving you so much trouble."

"Trouble depends on the way we take things," he answered.

"I wish I knew how you were taking this tiring journey," she said.

"Quite philosophically, I assure you."

"That does not help, either," she pouted. "Annoyance is annoyance, however patiently you may bear it."

"I have you to talk to," he laughed.

"And to laugh at."

"Now you are unjust to yourself and unfair to me."

"But I am quite certain you are laughing at me all the time—inside. Of course I deserve it, so I oughtn't to complain."

"You shouldn't jump to conclusions so hastily," he smiled. "As a matter of fact I am enjoying the ride immensely. The evening air is delicious and the country looks beautiful."

"It will be dark when you return."

"Not quite."

"Anyhow, I hope you will believe I am grateful—more grateful than I can tell. I wish words were not such stupid little things."

"Why stupid?"

"Oh, because—because . . . I'm not a bit of good at explaining. If you picked up my glove or handkerchief I should say, 'Thank you,' and I have no better word, no stronger word for you now when you have done for me the greatest thing in the world. I just say, 'Thank you.' It is all so weak—so inadequate."

"It seems to me you are very good at explaining," he smiled.

For a considerable time neither spoke again. Then Phyllis gave a little gasp. "We are close home now," she said. "Pull up at the first gate on your right."

"Oh, I see. You live this side of St. Runton?"

"Yes! We are almost there now. Slow down, please."

The car glided almost silently to a standstill close to the gate.

"Won't you let me drive you to the house?" he questioned.

"No, no!" she said. "It will be getting dark in the drive under the trees, and you would have all the trouble of opening and shutting the gate."

She got out quickly and he followed her, leaving the engine purring.

"You had better let me see you safe indoors," he said, pushing open the gate and holding it back for her to pass.

"Not a step farther, please. Do you want your car stolen? Besides, I am quite safe now." And she held out her hand to him.

Before he could take it, however, there was an interruption.

CHAPTER IX

TURK TAKES A HAND

TURK, who had been squatting at the bend of the drive, with head a little to one side in a listening attitude, gave a sudden bound and went tearing along the road at the speed of an express train, scattering the gravel in all directions.

“ Goodness gracious ! ” Betty exclaimed. “ I wonder what’s ’appened to the poor ’eathen beast,” and she started running in the same direction.

Phyllis, hearing the scutter of flying feet, turned her head suddenly and saw Turk rushing toward her like a grey streak. A moment later he was at her side licking her hands, leaping up to reach her face, rubbing his head against her coat, rushing round her like a catherine wheel, giving vent to low yelps and growls and behaving generally like a creature demented.

“ You darling Turk,” Phyllis exclaimed, and she stooped and put her arms about the dog’s neck and laid her face against his black nose. “ But what are you doing out-of-doors at this time of the evening ? ”

Turk snorted and sniffed and tried to lick her face, and pushed his nose up the sleeve of her coat and did everything except talk in order to explain how delighted he was.

Tresillian looked on with an amused smile on his lean face. Then he remarked quietly : “ Turk is evidently delighted to see you back again.”

Turk pricked up his ears and regarded the stranger with evident interest, then he came forward and smelt at his legs. Evidently this was someone he had not seen before.

Tresillian stooped and patted his head and called him by his name. "Doubt my respectability, eh, Turk?" he laughed.

Turk stood on his hind-legs and pawed his overcoat and tried to get a nearer look at his face, then he began to lick his hands.

"You'll do," laughed Phyllis. "Turk is tremendously particular about the friends he makes."

By this time Betty had drawn near, panting like a grampus, her eyes full of tears, her face like a collapsed jelly.

"Oh, my dear darlin' angel!" she gasped. "'Ave 'ee come back now safe and sound?"

"Quite safe and sound, Betty," and she caught the old woman in her arms and hugged her.

"Oh, my purty dear, I've been near mazed," Betty sobbed. "Be 'ee sure that you be all right?"

"Absolutely sure, Betty. Our car broke down and this gentleman, coming by, took compassion on me and brought me home," and she laughed a little nervously and looked at Tresillian.

Betty looked at the doctor for a moment or two, then remarked frankly, "Well, I like the looks of 'im, anyhow, which is more than I can say of the other."

"Oh, Betty!"

"'Tes true, my dear, and I'm not afeared to say it." Then, lifting her swimming eyes to Tresillian's face, she said: "You've arned my gratitude, sir, for ever and ever."

"Thank you, Betty," Tresillian smiled. "I feel a proud man."

"Then let us shake 'ands 'pon it, sir," and they did, Betty laughing and shedding tears at the same time.

Then Tresillian turned to Phyllis and said gravely: "If you will take my advice, Miss Dean, you will get to bed as soon as you can—before the reaction comes. You've had a bad shock, you know, and you will probably feel the effects of it for several days. Don't be alarmed, however. I leave you in safe hands. . . . Good-bye."

Phyllis took his hand in silence, and the eyes she raised to his were swimming with tears. So they parted.

A few minutes later they heard his car purring along the road; the sound growing fainter and fainter till it died away in the distance.

Betty and Phyllis walked arm-in-arm to the house, Turk walking in front, and turning his head at every few steps to make sure that he was being followed.

They entered by the side-door and found refuge in Betty's room. Phyllis dropped into Betty's rocking-chair with a sigh of relief and began to pull the pins out of her hat. 'Lijah came in from the pantry, smiling all over his face. "I'm purty an' glad to see 'ee safe 'ome again," he said sententiously.

Then Lucy bustled in from the kitchen. "Have you had a breakdown, miss?" she questioned.

"Yes, Lucy."

"I thought as much, miss. I kept telling Mrs. Martin that there was nothing to worry about," and she departed again for the kitchen.

Presently Phyllis said: "Where's uncle?"

"He's in the library, miss," 'Lijah answered. "He were fast asleep las' time I looked in."

"Is he very angry, do you think?"

"No, miss, I don't think so, but he was a bit worried. He eat nothin' sca'ce for dinner. He kep' sayin' you'd be all right. Since dinner he's kep' to himself in the libery . . . never once show'd out."

"I think you'd better tell him I've returned," she said.

"Yes, miss," and 'Lijah took his departure.

Daniel was still fast asleep when 'Lijah pushed open the door. "Miss Phyllis 'ave come 'ome, sir," he said in a low voice. But Daniel did not stir. So 'Lijah went farther into the room and spoke more loudly. "Miss Phyllis 'ave come 'ome, sir."

Daniel lifted his head suddenly and blinked. "What's that? What's that?" he questioned.

'Lijah repeated the statement.

Daniel sat up in his chair and brushed his hand across his eyes. "You say, Martin, that Miss Phyllis has returned? That's right, that's right. I must have had a nap, Martin. What do you think?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is she, Martin?"

"With my missus in 'er room, sir."

"Yes, yes," and Daniel staggered to his feet. His head ached and his voice was thick and husky, but he had slept off most of the effects of the alcohol he had taken. "I will be with her in a few moments," and he went off to the lavatory to put his head under the taps.

A few minutes later he walked jauntily into the house-keeper's room, his spare locks carefully brushed, his thin lips set.

Phyllis sprang up and kissed him on the forehead.

"You're late, little girl," he said huskily.

"Yes, uncle. The car broke down. At least that is what Sir John said : but I don't believe it."

"Not believe it, Phyllis ?"

"No, uncle. He had set a trap for me, but mercifully I escaped."

"Surely, surely——"

"I know what I am talking about," she said vehemently.

"Why did you not warn me against him, uncle ? Why did you invite him to the house ? Surely you must have known that he is a bad man, and yet you encouraged me to be friendly with him."

Daniel winced and the colour flamed into his cheeks. "You are tired, my child—overwrought," he said soothingly. "You had better go to bed and sleep over it. We will talk to-morrow," and he kissed her abruptly and left the room.

She sank back into her chair and sighed heavily. A horrible suspicion had been haunting her all the evening, and this brief interview with her uncle had done nothing to dispel it. She hated the thought ; hated herself for entertaining it, and yet she could not drive it away. It was as though some invisible hand was piecing together a picture-puzzle before her eyes. She did not want to look, but could not help herself. She saw the different pieces being fitted into each other. Saw the picture growing, growing with terrible certainty. . . . She swept her hand across her eyes and sat bolt upright.

Then the front-door bell rang and everyone started. Who could be calling at so late an hour ?

'Lijah trotted out into the hall and opened the door. Subdued voices floated into the room—'Lijah's voice and the voice of another. Phyllis felt a cold shiver run down

her spine. Turk growled and his bristles stood up in a ridge along his back.

"Lie down, Turk," she said.

Instead of obeying, he growled again and made for the closed door. Betty seized him by the collar and pulled him back. The voices ceased in the hall, and they heard the library door open and shut. Turk lay down again at his mistress's feet.

For several moments there was silence. Then Phyllis said in a voice that seemed to vibrate with terror :

"I'll not see that man, Betty."

"No, my dear."

"He shall never come to Pendare again with my consent."

"I'd like to skin 'im," Betty remarked.

"I know why he has come," Phyllis went on. "He wants to see me to explain, to pretend, to assure me. As if I could believe him!"

"You couldn't, my lamb. He'd lie like a gas-meter."

"You never liked him, Betty?"

"Never, my pet. The face of 'im is enough for me. Turk don't like him, either."

"Why?"

"Because the wretch kicked 'im."

"Kicked Turk?"

"Ay, dearie. It was the day he brought 'is mother over to see you. He drove the car round to the coach-house, and Turk came out of 'is kennel and smelled at 'is legs, and he just turned round and kicked the poor beast flying."

"The brute!"

"'Lijah says it was a mercy Turk was on his chain or he wouldn't 'ave been answerable for the squire's life; but for my part I don't see no mercy in it."

"It was a shameful thing to do," Phyllis said angrily.

"That's what I said to 'Lijah. Of course, the poor 'eathen beast ain't no beauty——"

"But he is a beauty, Betty."

"Well, lovey, there ain't no accounting for tastes, and they do say as 'ow ' a toad is a diamond in a duck's eye ' ; but I'd say this for the poor 'eathen critter, that 'es got a 'eart of gold, which is more than can be said for lots of Christians, as they call theirselves."

Turk grunted approval, and a few minutes later followed Betty into the kitchen.

Phyllis lay back in her chair and closed her eyes. She felt that she could not go to bed while Tresize was in the house. The knowledge that he was in an adjoining room seemed to set all her nerves on edge. Why had her uncle encouraged him ? The old haunting suspicion came back again. Why were they closeted in the library ? What were they discussing at this late hour ? It seemed as though some sinister influence was at work—something that threatened her happiness, her safety, the whole future of her life. Until to-day her life had been like the brook in the glen—clear, limpid, and untroubled : moving quietly and happily through a green valley, now laughing in the sunshine, now sleeping in the shadows, but always peaceful and serene. Now the waters had become restless and agitated. She felt that life could never be the same again. Her trust in people had been destroyed, faith had given place to suspicion, a serpent had crept into her garden. Henceforth she would have to be for ever on the watch.

Then a bell rang—the library bell. She sat up suddenly and opened her eyes. She heard the knob turned in the library door. She leaned forward with

wide-open eyes and waited ; she could hear her heart thumping against her side.

Now she heard footsteps along the passage. The door opened and 'Lijah came in.

" Please, miss," he said deferentially, " Mr. Teague wishes you to come into the library. Sir John Tresize wants to speak to you."

" Thank you, Martin," she said with an effort. " Will you say to my uncle that Miss Dean declines to see Sir John now or at any other time ? "

" Yes, miss," and 'Lijah took his departure.

Phyllis leaned back in her chair again and wondered if any further message would come.

Betty came back from the kitchen without Turk, and seeing her young mistress with her eyes closed, refrained from speaking.

" The poor dear is tired out," she reflected. " I must get her off to bed as soon as possible."

In the library the atmosphere had been somewhat electrical. Sir John had swaggered in, in his usual overbearing manner. He had the greatest contempt for Daniel, and he missed no opportunity of showing it. Usually Daniel sat cowed and humble in his presence. He knew that the baronet had the whip-hand, and it behoved him to be weak and conciliatory. To-night, however, he was still to some extent under the influence of alcohol, and as a consequence was abnormally courageous.

" Your man Martin informs me," Sir John began in his most truculent manner, " that your niece is at home."

" That is so."

" You've seen her ? "

"Of course I have."

"How did she get home?"

"I didn't ask her. You didn't bring her, it seems."

"I didn't, but I've got to see her. I've got to explain things, and the sooner the better. She's evidently got a wrong impression."

"Has she?" And there was a sneer in Daniel's tone.

"Of course she has, so don't be impertinent. We had a breakdown—a rather bad breakdown——"

"Indeed!"

"Do you mean to insinuate that you don't believe it?"

"She doesn't, anyhow."

"Ah! I thought that might be the case. I shall have to disabuse her mind."

"You think you will succeed?"

"Of course I shall succeed. You may be a fool, but she isn't. She will listen to reason. I can explain everything. It was not my fault that we had a puncture or that the engine went wrong. Such things are constantly happening. I must put it right with her at once."

"I wish you joy of it."

"What do you mean by that? Do you mean that you are not going to help me, not going to use your influence, not going to back me up?"

"I've done my best for you and you've played the fool."

"What! Call me a fool, do you? You'd better be careful or I'll smash you like an egg. Don't imagine that because I've failed in the first bout I'm defeated. I'm not defeated by a long chalk. I'm going to marry your niece—understand that—and you are going to help me."

"There's nothing to prevent your trying, of course," Daniel said, with a sneer, "but it might be just as well if you remembered that we are living in the twentieth century, not in the seventeenth."

"Bah! . . . Will you ring for your niece?"

"Certainly," and Daniel pressed his finger on the bell-push.

After 'Lijah had delivered his message there were several moments of strained silence. The baronet watched the door close with knitted brow. Then he gulped as though something had stuck in his throat. Slowly, as if unconscious of what he was doing, he replaced his cap and pulled it low over his forehead. Then followed a torrent of unprintable profanity.

Daniel lay back in his chair and smiled. Whatever might happen to-morrow or the day after did not trouble him. For the moment he was enjoying himself.

"Remember," was Sir John's final word, "if Phyllis remains obdurate I'll break you: break you as I'd break a rotten stick. Crush you as I'd crush a fly." And he pulled open the door and strode into the hall.

'Lijah was waiting for him, and without a word opened the front door and stood with his hand on the knob until he had descended the two steps to the gravelled drive. Then he closed the door softly.

Scarcely had the latch snicked, however, when there was a frightful yell outside, followed by a blood-curdling scream. Then followed a succession of broken sentences. "Martin there . . . Hi, you dev . . . Oh, murder! you . . . Quick, Martin—Martin . . . Your—dog . . . I say, oh! . . . Do you hear? . . . He's got me by . . . Call him off or . . . Oh! don't you see——"

'Lijah pulled open the door and descended the steps with considerable deliberation. It was clear enough to him what had happened, and he was by no means sorry that Turk had taken the opportunity of paying off old scores.

"Turk," he called. "Drop it. Come away at once. Do you hear. Turk——"

Turk gave a tremendous tug, turned slowly round and marched sedately towards the house, carrying in his mouth a large piece of tweed suiting.

Tresize hopped into his car, thrust in the clutch, and disappeared under the trees vociferating and declaiming at the top of his voice.

Daniel, Phyllis, and Betty, hearing the shouting and yelling outside, rushed simultaneously into the hall to know what was up. They were in time to see Turk march in at the open door with the ragged piece of tweed in his mouth. He took no notice of any of them, but walked to his basket, dropped the rag into it, then stepped in and lay on it.

No one spoke, but the little comedy seemed to affect them in different ways. 'Lijah, as became a well-trained servant, never moved a muscle. Daniel clapped his hand to his mouth and hurried off into the library. Betty, after an ineffectual attempt to keep her face straight, collapsed on a chair. Phyllis went off into shrieks of laughter.

It was the best thing that could have happened to her. It relieved the tension that had held her so long. Ever since she got back she had wanted to cry. Now she laughed without restraint—laughed till her sides ached and the tears ran down her face.

When she had recovered herself sufficiently she turned to her old nurse. "Betty dear," she said, wiping her

eyes. "I'll go to bed now. I think I shall be able to sleep."

Turk pricked up his ears and sniffed, but he did not move. An hour later, when the house was still, he left his basket and went and lay on the mat outside Phyllis's door.

CHAPTER X

UNPLEASANT TRUTH

PHYLLIS fell asleep quickly, and awoke two or three hours later to find that the night was full of sounds. Outside the trees were complaining to each other—now loudly and almost angrily, now softly and in whispers. Then her ears caught another sound, the sound of rain. It was falling on the leaves like soft music.

The sounds were soothing and comforting. She had always loved the voices of the wind and rain. They were friendly voices, voices that spoke of a power that was always watchful, always interested. She never felt lonely when the trees were whispering in the darkness and the rain was pattering on the leaves. Even storms did not alarm her. As a child she would clap her hands when the tall elms rocked and their branches creaked in the fury of the gale.

So to-night she felt comforted as she lay awake listening to the sounds that filled the night. The kindly Providence that was giving drink to the thirsty flowers, and washing the dust from the trees, and sweeping out the stagnant air from the valley, and filling the pools from which the cattle drank, was also watching over her, speaking to her in the wind and rain. Making music for her—wonderful music, now swelling out in deep organ notes, now dying away into the faintest whisper, until she could hear her watch ticking on the dressing-table. Then far away down the valley she would hear

it softly pulsing again, and growing louder and louder as it came on and on, rushing up the valley until it roared among the trees like the surf of the sea.

There was nothing terrific about it at all. It was comforting and companionable, like the voice of a friend. It soothed and healed her lacerated and overstrained nerves. It brought back to her a sense of the infinite—the presence of the Eternal.

While she lay listening sleep came to her again, and when next she opened her eyes the room was full of the light of day—not a bright light such as the mornings had brought of late, but a subdued light like that of early dawn.

Outside the trees were roaring more loudly than ever and the rain was coming down in torrents.

Then the door opened and Lucy came in with an early cup of tea.

“And how do you feel this morning, miss?” she inquired cheerfully.

“All right, Lucy, except that I am conscious of being dreadfully lazy,” she smiled.

“Well, I don’t wonder at it, miss. If I was you I’d be in no hurry to get up. There’s reely nothing to get up for, and its raining cats and dogs; so you’ll have to stick indoors in any case,” and then went and drew up the blinds.

The rain filled the valley like a mist and blotted out the distant hills and hid the pinnacles of St. Runton’s tower, and even obscured the one glimpse of the road that led into the town.

“The wind’s roaring like Tregagle hisself,” Lucy remarked sententiously. “You can hardly hear yourself think.”

“Then you’d better not think aloud,” Phyllis laughed.

"It's no use thinking quiet in a noise like this," was the ready reply, and Lucy left the room.

Phyllis had no talk with her uncle that day. With every hour that passed her weariness seemed to increase.

"I'll just lie still another hour," she kept saying to herself, "then I'll get up."

And when the hour had passed she would decide on just another hour. Bed was so "comfy," and outside the rain was coming down in sheets. No doubt she was lazy, but she could do nothing if she got up, so she might just as well remain where she was.

During the afternoon Betty came and sat with her and encouraged her in her laziness. They did not talk much. Betty had brought her knitting and it required a good deal of attention. Turk was allowed to come in and lay on the foot of her bed, and appeared to be amazingly content.

Phyllis watched the drifting rain, and for the most part thought of nothing in particular. Her brain was too tired to dwell on anything long. Yesterday was like a confused dream in which pleasure and pain were strangely mixed. Now and then faces came vaguely into her mental vision, remained for a few seconds and vanished. She saw the wrinkled, placid face of Mrs. Tresillian, with its crown of white hair; the smirking face of Mrs. Jory, with its fishy eyes; the freckled, fleshy face of Sir John Tresize, with its cruel mouth; the lean, intellectual face of the doctor, with its inscrutable smile, but she saw none of them very clearly, and sometimes they all got mixed up in a confused jumble.

Now and then, when she looked at Turk, she chuckled softly to herself. For the future, she decided, Turk should know more freedom than he had hitherto known.

Turk had proved himself her champion, and she would feel safe anywhere while he was near.

On the whole she felt thankful that she was too tired and too lazy to worry about anything. Subconsciously she was well aware that her hitherto placid life had become troubled, that influences were at work of which she had never before dreamed ; that her uncle had become something of a mystery which she dreaded to explore. But she need not bother about the matter just now, she told herself. She just wanted to be still and rest.

By the following day she was almost herself again. When Lucy pulled up the blind she saw that the brief eclipse of summer weather was at an end. The sunshine lay on the distant hills and bathed them in golden light. The wet leaves of the trees sparkled like diamonds. The pinnacles of St. Runton's tower shone like streaks of silver. The strip of sky above the tree-tops was unflecked by cloud.

It was nearly tea-time when a visitor was announced. Phyllis was curled up in a corner of the big couch in the drawing-room with an open book in her lap. Her heart gave a sudden thump when the door-bell rang. Dr. Tresillian had promised to call at the earliest opportunity, but surely he would not call so soon.

He had filled a big space in her thoughts during the morning. He was different from any other man she had ever met. Also he had rescued her from a peril she could not think of without a shudder. Try as she would, her thoughts persisted in harking back to the events of that nerve-racking afternoon.

Then the drawing-room door was pushed open and Miss Deersly was announced. Phyllis heaved a little sigh ; but whether of relief or disappointment she was not quite sure. Miss Deersly was the vicar's eldest daughter and

a person of considerable importance in St. Runton. Some people said that she ran the parish. Certainly she had her fingers in most pies. She played the organ, and drilled the choir, and superintended the Sunday school, and organised the church charities, and even (so it was declared) composed her father's sermons.

She was a breezy young woman of thirty-five, by no means bad-looking, and as full of energy as a young colt. She came into the room like a gust of wind and began talking as soon as her foot was across the threshold.

"Don't get up, please. 'Lijah told me you were resting. How deliciously cool it is here! Outside it's like a Russian bath . . . after yesterday's rain, of course. . . . I expect I look like a boiled lobster. I feel like it, anyhow. But how are you? You don't look anything to write home about."

"Oh, I'm all right," Phillis smiled. "Do take a seat. You'll have tea, of course?"

"Don't mind if I do, though I mustn't stay long. I always seem to be running after myself and never catching myself up. Do you ever feel like that? You would if you had a whole parish to look after."

"Pendare is almost more than I can manage," Phyllis laughed.

"Oh, child, you don't know you are alive yet. Wait until you—— But perhaps you'll follow my example and remain single . . . not that I am prepared to advise it—at least not as a permanency. There are drawbacks to everything, as far as I can see. However, I did not come to talk about that."

"No?" Phyllis questioned, and waited.

Miss Deersly, having broken off suddenly, seemed to have some difficulty in beginning again. She had a very definite object in her visit—she was not the kind of woman

to do things haphazard—but now in presence of Phyllis she seemed at a loss to know where to begin. Suddenly she made the plunge.

“Look here, Phyllis,” she said, “I’ve been hearing things about you lately.”

“About me?” Phyllis questioned, arching her eyebrows slightly.

“About you, my dear, and I’ve been very much worried. I hope you will not take me for an interfering busybody. Some people do, I know, but I mean well all the same, and I mean well in coming to see you this afternoon. You are young yet in spite of your twenty-one years, and that uncle of yours is a fossil and has no more sense where girls are concerned than a cow. Excuse me being so plain—I didn’t mean in face, but in speech. You are getting yourself talked about, my dear——”

“Talked about?” Phyllis questioned, with a look of consternation in her eyes.

“Just that, my dear. Unless people are lying, you have been seen motoring about the country with that reprobate Sir John Tresize. Is it true?”

“Why, yes. I am getting a car of my own directly, and Sir John offered to teach me how to drive——”

“He would, the scoundrel. You don’t know him, evidently. But what has your uncle been about? Why did he allow you to do it?”

“I did not consult him.”

“What? . . . You mean——? . . . Really, Phyllis.”

“I saw no harm in it. He is uncle’s friend. He and Lady Tresize have been here to dinner—he made himself extremely pleasant——”

“Bah! Pleasant, eh? That’s what comes of shutting up girls in boarding-schools for five years and keeping them in ignorance of the world in which they live. You

see, my dear, I am modern—much too modern for some folk. I don't believe in teaching girls as if they were Eves before the fall. Knowledge may be ugly sometimes—now and then it is frightfully ugly—but it is essential if we are to be saved from shipwreck. Your misfortune is that you have no mother to talk to you. You are naturally trusting and unsuspecting. You take everybody at their face value, and it won't do. It's not a bit of use keeping up illusions if they become a peril to us. It's all very well to be charitable and all that, but we've got to face facts. You can't pretend that people are good when you know they are evil—that's not charity, but foolishness——”

“But—but,” Phyllis interrupted, “I hope I am not quite so foolish as you think——”

“You've acted foolishly, my dear—there's no getting away from that,” Miss Deersly went on. “Not because you are not clever, but because you are inexperienced. You haven't been told what you ought to have been told. I'm not blaming you, but I do blame that uncle of yours. He knew—of course he knew : nobody better——”

“But is one to trust nobody ?” Phyllis asked piteously.

“Don't rush to extremes, dear. There's a difference between trusting nobody and trusting everybody. There are lots of people you can trust, for they have been tried and proved, but there are others whom it would be sheer madness to trust. Do you think a mouse is ever safe in trusting a cat ? or a fly safe in trusting a spider ? —and what you have got to learn is that there are some men who are human spiders. Oh yes, they can be pleasant and speak fair and go on spinning their web all the time.”

“But how is one to know that they are spiders ?” Phyllis persisted.

“How ? In the first place, a woman should use her common sense, and in the second place she should follow

her God-given instincts. In most cases she will not go far wrong if she does that."

Phyllis dropped her eyes and did not reply. She was only too painfully aware that she had done neither of these things. Just then, however, 'Lijah entered with the tea-tray, and conversation was suspended until he had left the room again.

"You are not offended with me, I hope?" Miss Deersly questioned a little anxiously.

"Of course I am not offended. . . . It is very good of you to put me on my guard. . . . Two lumps, did you say?"

"Only one, thank you. . . . I hope I am not a gossip, dear. . . . What I am going to tell you is not mere hearsay, but actual facts——"

When Miss Deersly left, Phyllis lay back on the couch and closed her eyes. In one thing, at any rate, her visitor was right. Truth was ugly sometimes—frightfully ugly. She almost wished that she had been spared the pain of listening. Life was growing more and more complicated. It was no longer the simple thing that she had imagined, and the world, instead of being a garden with flowers growing everywhere and birds singing in the trees, was a jungle, with ravenous beasts in hiding and snakes gliding through the grass. She wondered if she would ever be as happy again as in the old days.

That evening after dinner she opened her batteries on her uncle. The suspicion that had been haunting her during the last two days was getting on her nerves, and she wanted it cleared away as quickly as possible.

"You said the other night, uncle, when I complained of Sir John," she began, "that I was tired and overwrought and ought to sleep on it."

"Quite right, Phyl, I did."

"Well, I have slept on it. Slept two nights on it, and I am as convinced as ever."

"That is not proof, my dear. As far as I can see you have no proof. Why should Sir John set a trap for you? Besides, he must have had a bad breakdown or he he would not have been so late in getting back."

"That was so much dust in our eyes," she said warmly.

"Your saying so does not prove it, my dear. Sir John assured me that you had got an entirely wrong idea into your head. He says that he can explain everything. He wants to see you."

"And I refuse to see him. Let that be clearly understood. What is more, uncle, I cannot understand why you defend him. You know that he is not a good man."

He laughed uneasily. "I don't know that I've ever said he's a good man," he retorted. "He doesn't claim to be a saint."

"Well, then, you know that he's a bad man," she protested with vigour. "Let's have no beating about the bush. Honestly, would you like me to marry him?"

"Why, as to that, Phyl, I don't want you to marry anybody."

"That's no answer to my question," she said almost angrily. "You talked the other day about my getting married. Is he the kind of man you would choose for me?"

"My dear child," he said, in his most conciliatory tones, "I wouldn't dream of choosing anybody for you. That is a matter you must decide for yourself."

"And yet it was you who suggested that he should be invited here to dinner——"

"I have to keep on good terms with my clients, if possible——"

“ But it isn’t necessary that I should be on good terms with them ; and knowing the kind of man Sir John is, I cannot understand why you encouraged him to come here——”

“ You talk about ‘ the kind of man he is.’ I don’t suppose he is very different from other people. He is a man of the world. Socially he is equal to any man in the county——”

Phyllis raised her hands as if in protest and sighed wearily. She felt that it was of no use discussing the matter farther. He had not cleared away her suspicions ; he had only confirmed them.

“ I think we had better drop the subject, uncle,” she said in a tired voice. “ I wish it were possible never to think of it again.” And she rose from the table and left the room.

Daniel did not follow her into the drawing-room. He sat staring at his dessert-plate with troubled eyes.

“ I wonder what she believes ? ” he said to himself. “ How much does she suspect ? ”

He seemed to be getting more and more involved. It was difficult to hold with the hare and run with the hounds. He wanted to befriend Phyllis, to warn her and protect her, and yet he could not. He was bound hand and foot. At that moment he felt he would give all he possessed if he could be once more a free man. How true it was that the beginning of evil was like the letting-out of water.

During the next four days they saw little of each other. Phyllis did not once go beyond the grounds of Pendare. She entrusted the shopping to ’Lijah and Lucy. She did not want to go anywhere or see anyone. People were talking about her, discussing her, and she hated the very thought of it. She spent most of her time in

the garden. The rain had given new life to the weeds, and it took her all her time to keep pace with their growth. Turk was her inseparable companion. He lay on the grass and watched her with interested eyes.

It was on the afternoon of the fourth day that she heard Turk give a low growl, and raising her eyes she saw that he was making for the drive. She stood up and a sudden rush of colour mounted to her cheeks. For a moment or two she stood still and her heart seemed to miss a beat, then she dropped her trowel and went slowly forward to meet her visitor.

CHAPTER XI

PHYLLIS MAKES A DISCOVERY

BASIL TRESILLIAN came forward a little diffidently as if uncertain of the kind of reception he would get. Pendare was a surprise to him. He had expected to find a better sort of farmhouse. There was nothing in the unpretentious entrance to indicate what lay beyond. As he advanced, however, a puzzled look came into his eyes, he felt almost like a trespasser. These beautiful grounds stocked with fine timber did not look like part of a farm.

At the bend of the drive he stopped his car and got out. He had better reconnoitre on foot. Suddenly he came in view of the house, with its trim lawns, its broad terrace, its well-stocked flower-beds, its background of trees.

Then Turk caught sight of him and came toward him with a growl. The next moment he saw Phyllis in her blue overall and battered hat. Turk did not alarm him. He was never afraid of dogs. Perhaps for that reason they always made friends with him. Turk smelt at his legs and then jumped up and licked his hand.

By this time Phyllis was advancing to meet him, with a smile on her lips and a lovely colour staining her neck and face.

"I hope I am not intruding," he said as he shook hands with her. "The truth is, I was called in at a consultation about four miles from here, and being so near——"

"You thought you would pay your promised visit," she interrupted, with a laugh.

"That is so. Also my mother was anxious to know how you were, and I was equally anxious——"

"Did you expect to find me in bed?" she questioned in a bantering tone.

"Well, not exactly . . . At least, I hoped not. You look very well, anyhow."

"I am very well. I nearly always am. Doctors make very little out of me, I assure you."

"That's something to be grateful for," he smiled. "The less one has to do with doctors and lawyers the better."

"You regard them as necessary evils, perhaps?"

"They have their uses, of course," he said, with his slow smile. "They are what my mother calls a sad necessity."

"I expect your mother is right," she answered. "I hope she is well."

"She is never what one may call well," he replied gravely. "With constant care she is kept on her feet, but she will never be strong again."

"Oh, I am sorry. What a mercy she has you to look after her!"

To that he made no reply. He looked round him appraisingly, taking in the whole picture at a glance.

"Your uncle has a lovely place here," he remarked after a perceptible pause.

It was on the tip of her tongue to say that the place was hers, not her uncle's; but thought better of it. She hated anything that had the appearance of boasting.

"Yes, it is rather nice, isn't it?" she replied. "Would you like to look round the garden and grounds?"

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“ I should very much, if it is not trespassing too much on your time.”

“ Oh, my time is of very little value,” she said brightly, “ and besides, there’s always to-morrow. You are not frightfully busy yourself, I hope ? ”

“ I am never frightfully busy,” he said ; “ that is, my practice is not what one might call overwhelmingly large, and yet for some reason the days seem all too short.”

“ Your germs require a lot of tracking down ? ” she laughed.

“ That is true ” ; and they walked away together across the lawn. They talked in a desultory way as they made their way through the orchard and into the kitchen-garden : round by the stables and back through the rose-garden, till they came to the seat under the copper beech.

Phyllis had been turning over in her mind all the time whether or not she should invite him to stay to tea. The seeds of suspicion and distrust had been sown in her mind and had taken root. She was by no means sure that she could trust her instinct or her reason. Her faith even in her uncle had been shaken. A man might have the manners of a gentleman and yet be evil at heart. What was a girl to do ?

Suddenly she made up her mind. “ You will have time for a cup of tea before you return ? ” she questioned timidly.

“ Yes, indeed,” and his face lighted up instantly ; “ that is,” he added, “ if it is not troubling you too much.”

“ It will be no trouble,” she answered. “ We will have it here under the tree. It is our custom when the weather is fine.” And she darted off into the house.

In a few minutes 'Lijah appeared with a wicker table, followed by Betty carrying a silver tray.

"I know'd 'ee in a minute, sir," Betty said, her face beaming. "I hope you be well."

"Very well indeed," he replied, shaking hands with her.

"I'm glad you've called," Betty confided. "She needs a bit more company. She ain't been outside the gate since the night you brought her home."

"No?"

"She got a scare that day, she did, an' she needs cheerin' up a bit," and without waiting for a reply Betty waddled back to the house.

A few minutes later Phyllis came running out of the house dressed in flimsy summer attire, her head uncovered, and tiny whisps of her hair streaming out in the wind.

"What a girl she looks!" was Tresillian's thought, and his heart seemed to quicken its beat.

It did not seem to him that she needed cheering in the least. Her eyes were bright, her cheeks aglow, her lips a little apart, her whole manner full of vivacity and charm.

Tresillian drank three cups of tea and ate a quantity of bread and butter and cake, and yet seemed quite unconscious of the fact. The only thing he seemed conscious of was her presence. They talked, of course—talked freely and without restraint. She drew him out unconsciously, led him from one subject to another. They discussed flowers and books and the political situation. They skirted round religion and philosophy. They spoke of their favourite authors and statesmen.

To Phyllis it was an entirely new experience. She recalled the afternoon—how long ago it seemed!—when she had entertained Sir John Tresize under the

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same old tree and in very similar weather, and yet how immeasurable the contrast !

Sir John had sat on the grass and hugged his knees and stared at her with his bovine eyes, and seemed incapable of talking about anything except hounds and horses and motor-cars. On that afternoon she had looked longingly for the appearance of her uncle and was impatient to get rid of her guest.

Now she wanted to keep her guest as long as possible, wanted the conversation to continue indefinitely, wanted time to stand still, and almost dreaded the moment when the spell should be broken.

How well he talked ; how simply and yet how easily, drawing out the best that was in her ; lighting up his conversation with flashes of quiet humour, and startling her now and then with some daring bit of philosophy !

The minutes passed unheeded, the spirit-lamp burnt itself out under the kettle, the sun dipped lower behind the trees, what was left of the tea grew cold in the pot, and then 'Lijah came out to fetch away the tray.

Tresillian rose slowly and held out his hand.

" Turk and I will walk with you to the gate and see you safe off the premises," she laughed.

While he was starting the engine they walked on ahead, and when he reached the gate Phyllis was holding it open for him.

" Don't forget to remember me to your mother," she called to him after he had passed through.

He waved his hand to her and was gone.

She walked slowly back, taking no notice of Turk and seeing nothing of the road. For the moment she seemed to be in dreamland or fairyland. Then suddenly she drew herself up with the question—Why ?

But to that question she could find no answer—at

least, she could find no answer to which she was prepared to give assent. Tresillian no doubt was a rather charming personality. He was unlike any other man she had ever met. He was serious yet humorous ; friendly and yet casual ; courteous, and yet he paid no compliments.

He had not treated her, however, as if she were a schoolgirl. She liked him for that. Of course, he knew a thousand times more than she did ; had read far more widely and thought more deeply. He was a 'Varsity man and a student spending all his spare time in original research, and yet there was nothing of the pedant about him.

He was quite human—boyish in some respects. They had met on common ground, talked frankly and freely to each other, disputed with each other on one or two points.

Yes, she liked him. He was quite charming, but could she trust him ? She knew nothing about him except what his mother had told her, and mothers, of course, were always prejudiced. Perhaps she had better see as little of him as possible.

She had been strongly tempted for a moment to invite him to her coming-of-age festivities the following week. No doubt she had been wise in not doing so, and in not inviting him to call again. The memory of Miss Deersly's lecture still lingered with her. A girl in her position could not be too careful.

Half an hour later Betty heard her singing to herself in the drawing-room. The old woman paused in her work and listened. Then a smile lighted up her homely face.

" Bless her 'eart ! " she said to herself, " she wanted cheering up, an' I b'lieve that young man have done it."

The following week Phyllis had no time to think of

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Tresillian or of anyone else in particular. Monday and Tuesday were spent in preparation for the birthday celebration. A marquee was erected on the lawn, and all her tenants, whether of farm or cottage, were invited to luncheon. After the luncheon there was to be a garden-party open to nearly everybody, and on the following day there was to be a bun-feast for the children.

For four days Phyllis lived in such a whirl of excitement that nothing seemed quite real to her. Early in the forenoon of Wednesday Colonel Bolitho motored over from Tregony Chase "to give up his seals of office and to render an account of his stewardship," as he expressed it. Phyllis gave him a welcome that gladdened his heart.

He was "the same dear old bear of a colonel," she told him; the same fierce moustache and kindly blue eyes, the same rasping voice and jolly laugh. He showed her more real affection in an hour than her uncle did in a year.

Daniel was quiet and apparently depressed. He did not know exactly where he stood. He also was rendering an account of his stewardship, and Phyllis had told him nothing of her plans for the future. She might ask him to continue or she might take the management of the estate into her own hands. She was quite capable of doing it. He had no doubt on that point. Ever since she returned from school she had been looking into everything, and few things escaped her eyes. He sighed when he thought of possibilities that might have come his way and yet had always eluded him.

Phyllis was a little startled when she discovered what her income would be. Ever since her father's death money had been accumulating, which—thanks to the Colonel—had been invested in safe securities, so that

now she found herself with a bigger income than even her father enjoyed.

Some girls would have been elated and would have started to consider how much more enjoyment they would be able to squeeze out of it. They would have thought of it in terms of furs and diamonds and motor-cars, and dances and dinners and theatres. But Phyllis was not built that way—not that she did not want enjoyment and pretty dresses and the company of her friends, and a dance occasionally, and a trip to London when she felt in the mood—but she saw other things in life—greater things. Hence, while she was thrilled and delighted at the thought of being her own mistress and having more to spend than she had ever dreamed possible, she was also a little overawed by a deep sense of responsibility.

After all, she had earned none of this money. It had been earned for her by the toil and enterprise of other people, and it would continue to flow into her lap in a continual stream because other people would toil and plod and scheme and adventure.

She had not been reading books on political economy for nothing. She had got a clue to the sources of wealth and the meaning of wealth. She could not by any process of reasoning divorce riches from responsibility. She was up against life in a more real sense than she had ever been before. Hence while she thrilled at the thought of her larger freedom, that thrill was tempered by the thought of her larger responsibility.

The lunch was fixed for one o'clock, but soon after noon her guests began to arrive. Farmers and their wives in gigs and dogcarts, cottagers and labourers on foot; and all dressed in their Sunday best. They stood about on the lawn and under the trees and discussed the weather and the crops and cast anxious eyes in the

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direction of the marquee where lunch was to be served. A little later came the vicar and his wife and the new curate. Then came the Nonconformist ministers and the Salvation Army Captain and a number of local J.P.s and retired tradespeople. Nobody was late, and when the clock struck one every seat was occupied.

Phyllis was toasted in terms that brought the tears to her eyes. Colonel Bolitho made the longest speech of his life, and certainly the most eloquent. Two or three local magnates insisted on supporting the toast, and when it was drunk there was tremendous clapping and cheering. Phyllis made a little speech in reply that won all hearts, and then the company adjourned.

By this time those who had been invited to the garden-party began to arrive, the St. Runton Brass Band leading the way. Phyllis hurried hither and thither among her guests, shaking hands with everybody and doing her best to make everyone feel at home. She had done her best to meet all tastes. There was tennis for the more active, and croquet and putting competitions for the less nimble. Part-songs and glees for the musically-inclined, and a conjuring entertainment that pleased everybody, and as the afternoon waned the young people indulged in a dance on the lawn.

Phyllis went to bed that night feeling strangely happy, but too tired to think. The next day she felt happier still. She had provided a cake and bun feast for the children. They came in hundreds. Many of them were a little shy at first, but they quickly got used to their surroundings. They climbed the trees, they jumped the leat, they indulged in leap-frog and tug-of-war, they ran races, they practised croquet and putting, they stood on their heads and gave cart-wheel performances, and finally went into raptures over a Punch-and-Judy show.

Phyllis laughed till her sides ached. But the *pièce de résistance* was the gastronomical display. How they ate ! Many of them appeared to have fasted for the occasion. As Phyllis watched them her feelings alternated between mirth and amazement. It was then she made a discovery—a discovery that came to her with all the force of a revelation. She was conscious of feeling strangely and delightfully happy. She believed she had never been so happy before, and she was happy just because she had made other people happy—that was her discovery.

She had heard the doctrine expounded that “it was more blessed to give than to receive,” but she had thought nothing of it—had never really believed it. Now she had proved it. She had not sought happiness—had not expected it. In fact, she had expected to be bored—perhaps irritated and annoyed. She had set out to entertain the children, to give them a good time. There were not many red-letter days in the lives of most of them, and she wanted to make this day one of them. Neither her uncle nor the Colonel had approved. It was all right to give a luncheon to her tenants and the local gentry ; and a garden-party if she liked ; but to have the children overrunning the place, trampling the flower-beds and kicking up the lawns, and making mischief generally : No !

She had persisted, however, and this was the result. In giving to others without a thought of self, she had found the very thing she had often selfishly sought. She was tired, of course, and her flower-beds had suffered, and it might take a week to get everything shipshape again, but what of that ? She had made hundreds of little friends, had put a gracious memory into their grey lives which they would never forget, and in doing so had

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struck a chord of music in her own heart which would vibrate for days and weeks to come.

Her last visitor had departed, and the angel of night had begun to hang her fairy lamps in the sky, when she retraced her steps to the house. She found her uncle in the library looking worried and depressed.

"We've had a great day, uncle, haven't we?" she laughed.

"I'm glad you think so," he answered a little sourly.

"Oh! but we have—a really glorious day: and I've laughed till my sides are sore. And now before I go to bed I want just a word with you."

"Yes?" he questioned gloomily.

"Well, it's this. We've never talked about the matter and you have never asked questions, but you will understand, uncle, that I want no change at Pendare."

"You mean—?" and he raised his head quickly and his eyes brightened.

"I mean that I would like you to remain steward and at the same remuneration, and to live on here as my guardian just as though I had not come of age."

"You really mean that, Phyl?"

"Of course I mean it, uncle. Why should there be any change? You don't want to cast me adrift, do you?"

"Cast you adrift? Not likely. But you might want to cast me adrift."

"Well, I don't. I want you to go on just as you have been doing, and I shall have to take the Colonel's place. I mean I shall have to keep books and check all accounts and consult with you if there should happen to be any money to invest or any improvements to make. I intend to take up my duties seriously. I don't believe in a girl being merely ornamental."

“Quite right, Phyl. Quite right. I expect you will make things hum,” and he laughed quite cheerfully for him. All his depression had vanished. Once more the future held possibilities.

CHAPTER XII

FRIEND AND FOE

THE absence of Tresize from Phyllis's coming-of-age celebrations was commented on by a number of people. It was known that he was on visiting terms, and that at least on two occasions they had been seen motoring together. A few people persisted in the belief that a marriage had been arranged between them, whilst the majority hoped that such an alliance would never take place. Hence when he did not appear either at the luncheon or at the garden-party, Phyllis's friends regarded it as evidence that the rumour had no foundation in fact. Phyllis was greatly loved in St. Runton, while Sir John was cordially disliked, and to most of those who attended the luncheon his absence was a source of considerable gratification. Phyllis sincerely hoped that she had seen the last of him.

Sir John, however, had no intention of retiring from the contest. He had been beaten in the first round, but that only made him the more determined to win in the end. He was essentially British in the tenacity with which he held to his purpose. Failure only stimulated him to fresh endeavour, and as he had no scruples as to the means he used, he rarely despaired of ultimate victory.

After his encounter with Turk he went for a short cruise on his yacht—a small motor-driven craft in which he escaped from the boredom of Polgrain and entertained

small bridge-parties, which usually helped him to replenish his exchequer. On this occasion, however, he went alone. He was in no mood for company. Turk's teeth had in no case drawn blood, but had left him with a number of bruises which reminded him painfully of the complete failure of his plans.

Phyllis had outwitted him—there was no getting away from that—she had proved herself cleverer than he, and he was terribly chagrined in consequence. He hated being beaten by anyone, but to be beaten by a woman was maddening.

Losing the first trick, however, did not necessarily mean losing the game. He had still some trump cards in his hand. For the future he would have to play more cautiously. He had been too confident, too precipitate, too sure that Phyllis was quite unsuspecting. On the next occasion he would have to provide for every contingency and leave no possible loophole of escape.

He had two objects in view now. The first was to "get his own back," and the second to make her his wife. He was quite sincere in desiring to marry her—she had caught his fancy as no girl had ever done before—but he was equally anxious to be "even with her." She had had the effrontery to flout him, and, more maddening still, to outwit him, and no Tresize could take such humiliation lying down.

So as he cruised idly up and down the coast he bent his mind to the problem that confronted him. That she might be won by fair means he no longer considered. That she would be suspicious of him was a fact he could not afford to overlook. His first failure, he realised, had enormously increased his difficulties. His next move would have to be sudden and unexpected. That he

would be able to carry it through he had no doubt whatever.

He returned to Polgrain two days after Phyllis's birthday, and soon after had made himself acquainted with all that had happened. It could hardly be said that he had a secret service of his own, and yet a number of people found it to their advantage to supply him with all the information he needed.

In this way he discovered in whose motor-car Phyllis had escaped from Trevear, and soon after he knew all there was to be known of Dr. Tresillian. The story that the doctor had thrown up a lucrative post in Canada and come back to Redstone for the sole purpose of looking after his widowed mother he dismissed with scorn. Men did not do that kind of thing. There was something at the back of it. Something, most likely, that would not bear the light. It might not be amiss to set on foot a few inquiries, especially as the fellow had had the impudence to call on Phyllis at Pendare.

He scented a possible danger in this direction. Phyllis was warm-hearted and impulsive, and the fact that the fellow had rescued her from what she believed to be imminent danger would appeal to her romantic nature. There was no immediate danger, however. Redstone was more than a dozen miles from Pendare, and it was unlikely that they would see each other often.

He foresaw also—now that Phyllis had come into the public eye, as it were—that she would have a number of admirers. Up to the present her uncle had kept her in pretty complete seclusion. Dinners and dances and garden-parties had been unknown at Pendare. He and his mother had been almost the first to penetrate its seclusion.

Now, he presumed, that was at an end. After the junketings that had marked her coming-of-age there was no knowing what might happen. She was no longer under the control of Daniel Teague and Colonel Bolitho. She was her own mistress. She would have any amount of money to spend. She might fill the house with company—might even decide on a permanent companion.

He had hoped to win her consent before this happened, and it was maddening to think how completely he had failed.

The more he thought about the matter the more the difficulties seemed to mount up. From a social point of view he was no doubt the most eligible bachelor in the neighbourhood; but that would count for nothing with Phyllis. Indeed, it never had counted. That was one of the things he could not understand.

Meanwhile other young men in the neighbourhood would be on the alert. Men much younger than himself, more attractive, and with a better reputation. He foresaw dinners and dances from which he would be excluded. Tennis-parties and garden-parties in which he would have no place.

Phyllis was young and attractive, and with a big fortune at her own disposal. Of course she would have admirers—any number of them. Now that she had come out of her seclusion they would be round her like bees round a honey-pot.

He would have to mature his plans without unnecessary delay, and pounce suddenly and unexpectedly. Of course he would treat her well, and she as a sensible girl would accept the inevitable with a good grace and make the best of it. He would give her a fine position in the county, and they would no doubt be very happy together.

So in his heavy blundering way he imagined, and to this end he planned.

Meanwhile Phyllis was so absorbed in new interests and new duties that she had no time to think of Sir John. True to the promise she had long since made to herself, she at once set about finding a motor-car. In this the Colonel came to her rescue. He knew a gentleman—a Mr. Roger Hicks—who had a car to sell. He had purchased it with the intention of driving it himself, and taking his wife round with him. When, however, Mrs. Hicks saw this two-seater coupé she turned up her nose with scorn. She declared she wouldn't be seen dead in it, and that if she could not have a proper motor-car she would have none at all, the result being that the car had not been out of the garage half a dozen times since it was purchased, and Hicks was now prepared to sell it for any reasonable sum.

The Colonel motored over to Pendare early one morning and took Phyllis with him to see the machine. Phyllis fell in love with its appearance at once. It was just the kind of runabout on which she had set her heart. The Colonel's chauffeur examined the engine and tested it. The Colonel himself made a close inspection of the fittings and upholstery. Phyllis ran her eyes over the tonneau and could not discover even a scratch on the varnish. Then the chauffeur and Phyllis took a run in it for three or four miles and back, and found that it answered all tests. It was practically a new machine and by one of the best makers.

The bargaining was left to the Colonel, and half a hour later Phyllis's cheque was in the hands of Rog Hicks and she was in possession of the car. Never before in her life had she felt so elated. No child wi

a new toy ever experienced a more exquisite thrill of delight. The dream of years had come true.

"Now, you dear darling old bear," she said to the Colonel, her eyes sparkling, her lips apart, her cheeks a wild-rose pink, "I am taking you back to lunch with me."

"What?" he exclaimed, "do you think I am going to trust my life in your hands?"

"And you a soldier," she laughed, "and afraid."

"Phyl, my dear," he protested with mock seriousness, "after all the years I have watched over you, do you mean to be the death of me?"

"Not just yet," she laughed. "I want you to live a few years longer. Now get in by my side. Evans can bring along your own car."

The Colonel sighed and took the vacant seat. Phyllis thrust in the clutch and off they went. Neither of them talked until they reached Pendare. The Colonel watched her a little anxiously, but she never looked in his direction. He noticed, however, that her hands were quite steady and that she showed not the least sign of nervousness. The road was one to test her skill. It was narrow and hilly, and twisted in all directions. It was not until they got within two miles of Pendare that she could let the engine "rip." The Colonel pressed down his hat a little more tightly and held his breath. The hedges flew past like green streaks, the wind whipped their cheeks and hummed in their ears. The engine purred joyously.

The gate had been left open, so they passed through without a pause and pulled up in front of the house with a flourish.

"Now then, you dear old doubter," she laughed, showing two rows of white, even teeth, "what about it now?"

"Well, what about it?" he gurgled.

"You are still alive, aren't you?" and she laughed again.

"I believe I am," he chuckled. "Yes, thanks to a merciful Providence." And he got out slowly and made his way into the house, while she took the car round to the coach-house, which henceforth was known as the garage.

After lunch they repaired to the library for a quiet talk. The Colonel was glad of the opportunity. It was the first they had had since her coming-of-age.

"I don't want to say a word against your uncle," he said seriously. "He is a good fellow in many ways. Also he is very fond of you and has your best interests at heart. But . . . well . . . how shall I put it? He is fond of taking risks—that is, in money matters. If he had a lot of money of his own he would plunge, on the off-chance of making a big scoop. You understand? Well, that kind of thing comes off occasionally, but not often. My advice to you is, be content with safe securities and moderate dividends. Within the next few months several of your Government bonds fall due. You will want to reinvest the money. Your uncle will probably point out how you will be able to get a much bigger interest than you have been getting. You will be flooded with prospectuses that will show wonderful dividends on paper. Now, my dear, money isn't everything. Big dividends mean taking big risks. If you get bitten by that kind of thing you may easily lose all your fortune. You have quite enough, Phyl, for all your wants—more than enough. You may do a lot of good if you use it wisely, but if you begin to gamble with it . . . well, gambling is like drugs or drink. . . . My

dear, keep the gambling spirit at bay. . . . There, I have said enough, perhaps too much . . .”

“No, Colonel dear, you have not said a word too much,” she protested. “I am so thankful you have spoken, and I think you have made me understand a few things that have puzzled me for a long time past. Do you think that uncle gambles?”

The question was so sudden that it caught the Colonel off his guard.

“Your uncle, my dear?” he stammered. “No, no . . . of course not . . . that is, not in any big way. He’s fond of a game of bridge—most people are—and he bets now and then on a horse. But . . . but . . .”

“Do you think he is in debt to Sir John Tresize?”

“Good gracious, child! . . .” the Colonel almost gasped.

The conversation had taken a turn he had not anticipated. Evidently she entertained fears that had crossed his own mind. “What has put such a question into your head?” he asked, with a startled look in his eyes.

Phyllis hesitated for a moment or two, then she told him the whole story. Of her uncle’s fits of depression, of his eagerness to get Sir John invited to dinner, of the baronet’s visits to Pendare, of his proposal, of the trap he set for her and her escape, and of her uncle’s defence of him since.

“I have a feeling, somehow,” she concluded, “that the squire has some kind of hold upon uncle, that he is using him as his tool—compelling him to play a part that in his heart he loathes.”

Bolitho listened with a very troubled face. This was worse than anything he had ever imagined.

“My dear child,” he said, after several moments of silence, “I hope you are mistaken.”

"I am not mistaken as regards the wickedness of Sir John Tresize," she answered promptly.

"And your uncle would let you marry him?"

"I believe he would—I really do. He has thrown out hints about the social position and all that."

"My poor child."

"Oh, you need not be afraid," she laughed. "I think I am able to look after myself—with you to help me," she added.

"Come to me at any time, my dear; or ring me up. . . . But you are not on the telephone——"

"Not yet; but I'm having it installed at once. I'm having a lot of things done; I'm going to spend heaps of money."

"Spend it wisely, child . . . wisely. And if you want advice——"

"I know," she laughed. "You are going to be my friend and ally."

"By Jove, I am—to the last ditch."

"Oh, we won't talk about ditches," she laughed, "but about highways. We are not going to retreat, but march forward."

"And upward," he smiled; "that's life, my child, as it should be—ever upward. It's a tough business sometimes, but right always wins out in the end. Never forget that, Phyllis. 'The path of the just,' you know."

She did not know the quotation. She was not so well versed in the Bible as he, so she remained silent.

The Colonel reflected for several minutes. He forgot the flight of time, forgot that his car was waiting for him outside. Phyllis's story had alarmed him more than he cared to admit. If Daniel Teague was in league with Sir John Tresize—however unwillingly—Phyllis was in considerable danger. He knew the baronet slightly,

knew the type of man he was : a man of iron will and of unyielding determination ; a man without imagination and without conscience ; an only son, spoiled from his infancy, allowed to have his own way in everything until any opposition to his wishes appeared to him a wrong to be ruthlessly swept away. There was no knowing what such a man would do. It was already clear what he had attempted, and though he had failed, was that any guarantee that he would not try again ? Would it not rather increase his determination to make another attempt ? His purpose was clear enough. Possibly he wanted Phyllis for her own sake ; but he would also have an eye on her fortune. If . . . But no, she was already on her guard.

“ You are not afraid of Tresize ? ” he questioned presently, without looking at her.

“ Not in the least. I have Turk, and he rarely lets me out of his sight.”

Turk, who lay at her feet, hearing his name spoken, opened his eyes and grunted. Then he rose to his feet and nuzzled against her knee.

“ I hope your uncle is not in any way under the thumb of Sir John,” the Colonel continued. “ But in any case, I am sure he is awfully fond of you. . . . I will run over again soon and see how you are getting on. So don’t worry, little girl.”

“ I don’t intend to,” she laughed. “ And thanks so much for your good advice.”

She went with him to the door and saw him into his car then stood for some time looking out across the peaceful landscape. She was not afraid, and yet she was in greater danger than she knew.

CHAPTER XIII

DRIFTING

PHYLLIS's first long trip in her car was to Redstone to pay her promised visit to Mrs. Tresillian. Turk sat on the vacant seat by her side looking as solemn as a judge. At first he had shown a little nervousness, but he quickly got over it, and now he persisted in going everywhere with her.

Already the little car was well known in St. Runton and in several of the adjacent villages. Turk also received respectful recognition. But no one attempted to come near the car while he kept ward and watch.

It was with some little trepidation that Phyllis set out on the journey. Not that she was afraid of missing her way : she had already made a careful study of the road-map of Cornwall, and was determined before winter came to explore the county from Launceston to the Land's End.

But to travel more than a dozen miles to see an old lady whom she had seen but once in her life, and who was the mother of the man who interested her more than any other man in the world, required a little courage. Had she been less interested in the son she could have gone with more confidence to see his mother, and yet but for the son would she have been so anxious to pay her visit ?

She wanted to be quite frank and honest with herself, and she had to admit, with a little fluttering at her heart, that Mrs. Tresillian was not the only person she wanted to see.

It was quite natural, of course ! She saw no reason why she should ignore the truth. Any other girl in similar circumstances would feel as she felt. It was not only that he had come to her rescue in the most perilous moment of her life—any clod of a man might have done that—but he had proved himself to be a man of exceptional qualities. She never thought of him without a little thrill of admiration. He was clever ; he read papers before learned societies ; he seemed to her an original thinker ; also he was gentle and kind and chivalrous. There surely could be no harm, therefore, in wanting to know him better.

She had been so busy with these thoughts that she had taken no count of the miles ; consequently she found herself in Redstone before she was aware. She slowed down in front of the house, with her heart beating uncomfortably fast.

Turk hopped into her seat directly she left the car and looked about him with an air of defiance. The door was opened, in response to her ring, by the same trim house-maid, and a moment later she was welcomed by Mrs. Tresillian with open arms.

" So you have come at last ? I had almost given up expecting you," and the old lady kissed her on both cheeks.

" I wanted to get used to my new car before I ventured so far," Phyllis answered a little breathlessly.

" Do you mean that you have come all the way by yourself ? "

" Of course I have. I am getting quite expert at driving. Won't you come and look at my car ?—she's a beauty ! "

" But, my dear——" expostulated Mrs. Tresillian as she followed Phyllis down the garden path. Then with a gasp, " Oh, what a terrible dog ! "

"Oh, that's Turk," Phyllis said, with a laugh. "My constant companion, you know, and the dearest, loveliest, and most beautiful dog there ever was."

Turk turned his head slowly and regarded Mrs. Tresillian with solemn eyes.

"Well, he may be faithful and all that," the old lady smiled, "but I fear no one could say he's beautiful."

"Oh, but he is," Phyllis laughed; "almost as beautiful as the car—and isn't she a picture?"

"It looks a very nice car indeed—very nice."

"I came of age last month, you know," Phyllis confided.

"Oh, I see. And this is a birthday present. Well, well, your uncle must be a very kind and generous man."

Before Phyllis could reply another car hove in sight and pulled up with a jerk.

Phyllis could not help noticing how the old lady's face lighted up in a moment, and her eyes glowed as from an inward fire.

"Here's Basil, bless him!" she exclaimed. "I was beginning to feel a bit worried. His lunch has been waiting these two hours."

The doctor came forward and kissed his mother, then turned to Phyllis.

"So this is your new car?" he questioned. His manner was quite casual, though he gripped her hand warmly.

"Yes. And now I want you to tell me what you think of her."

He shook hands with Turk first; then he lifted the bonnet and looked at the engine.

"She looks all right," he laughed, "but the proof of the pudding, you know——"

"I'd ask you to take a run in her, but from what your mother tells me you must be famished," she interrupted, "so please don't let me waste any of your time——"

"I'm not going to," he said, with one of his rare smiles. "Come into the house and talk to mother. Turk will keep guard over both cars."

She had no intention of making a long stay, but somehow time passed unnoticed. The doctor was an excellent conversationalist when he liked, and could make any subject interesting. They drifted from one subject to another without effort and without constraint, and when at length Phyllis rose to go tea was announced.

She sat down again with a laugh, not at all sorry that she would have to remain a few minutes longer. Moreover, she was quite ready for a cup of tea. The day was hot and sultry, and she was quite thirsty after so much talk.

Tresillian waited on them. He did not need tea himself, having only just finished his lunch. Phyllis felt his eyes on her every now and then, but she did not mind; she rather liked it. He no longer regarded her as a mere schoolgirl. He seemed interested in everything she said, and treated her as an intellectual equal.

On the way back he filled her thoughts. She kept recalling not only the things he had said, but the tones of his voice, the look in his eyes, the pressure of his hand when he said good-bye.

As she neared home she overtook the Rev. David Weekes, the new curate. She ran slowly past to make sure she was not mistaken. She had seen him once only at her birthday luncheon, but his was a face not easily forgotten.

She pulled up at the roadside and waited for him to come near.

"Can I give you a lift, Mr. Weekes?" she questioned, with a genial smile.

"I should be so grateful if you would," he said frankly. "These Cornish roads are like an oven."

Turk did not seem overpleased at having to share his seat with a stranger, but after a contemptuous sniff he moved aside.

"This *is* a treat," the curate said gratefully as the car spun along between the tall hazel-grown hedges and the cool air whipped his hot cheeks.

"You look tired," Phyllis said sympathetically.

"I'm not only tired, Miss Dean, but I'm hot and dusty, and these black clothes—ugh——"

"You should wear white," Phyllis laughed.

"I wish I could," he answered, and he took off his clerical wide-awake and wiped his forehead. "Custom and convention, Miss Dean, are like the laws of the Medes and Persians. But could anything be more absurd than clerical attire in weather like this?"

"You should get up a petition to the Bishops or to Convocation to have the fashion changed," she laughed.

"And be snubbed or regarded as a lunatic for your trouble."

Phyllis drove him into St. Runton and left him at his lodgings at the far end of the town, and won something more than gratitude as a consequence.

On her way back to Pendare she confided to Turk that she rather liked the curate. "He is certainly plain," she said, "but he is frank and unaffected."

Three days later she again met Basil Tresillian. True to her resolve to explore her native county, she set out for Tintagel to see King Arthur's Castle. Leaving her car at the hotel, she climbed the steep path to the old ruin, and while seated on the warm turf with Turk by

her side, listening to the low surge of the waves, Tresillian joined her.

"I expected to find you here," he said, his face alight with pleasure.

"But how? I did not know I was coming till this morning."

"I saw your car parked with a number of others."

"And you recognised it again?"

He nodded and dropped on the grass at her feet.

"Isn't it lovely?" she questioned.

"Nature is eternally trying to express herself in terms of beauty," he answered.

"Then she doesn't always succeed."

"You think not? And yet the effort is there, and the promise is ever on its way to fulfilment. I think sometimes that beauty is the ultimate end as well as the ultimate cause."

"Surely something more than beauty is aimed at?"

"What more?" he questioned, smiling at her.

"Why, character; moral perfection."

"And what is moral perfection but beauty?"

"Oh, I see," she replied, blushing slightly, "but you get a bit beyond me sometimes."

"It is but an idea," he smiled, "not original by any means. Yet one likes to think of the whole creation moving towards that far-off Divine event."

"But can it be reached? I mean can there be any ultimate? Can beauty ever be so beautiful that there is nothing beyond?"

"You mean physical beauty?"

"No, I include all realms—physical, moral, spiritual, intellectual."

"Now you are getting beyond me," he laughed.

"You think my question foolish?"

"No, I don't. It is a question we are all asking—that is, those who think at all. For myself, I hold that there must always be a beyond—a something more ; or else there would come a time when all effort would cease, human and Divine—Nature would give up evolving—the morning stars would cease to sing."

"But that would mean—— ? "

He looked up into her eyes and smiled comprehendingly.

"Exactly," he said. "Meanwhile there is the eternal urge ; everywhere and in everything. Painters, poets, orators, sculptors, musicians, as well as that vast force we call nature, are all seeking to express themselves in terms of greater beauty."

She did not reply. Her brow was puckered and her eyes fixed on the great ocean that stretched away into the infinite.

"I think it is time we got down to more mundane things," he laughed. "What do you say to our having lunch together ? "

For a moment she hesitated. To what was this strange acquaintanceship leading ? Then she flung her fears aside.

"Why, I should be delighted," she said.

After lunch they went for a walk along the cliffs and talked of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, of Sir Lancelot and Guinevere, of the search for the Holy Grail and the passing of Arthur. She had never heard of Mallory, but she had read Tennyson's "Idylls of the King" more than once, and so was able to hold her own in their conversation.

How the moments sped away and lengthened into hours ! Surely it was a day of days—a day of beauty and sunshine, of whispering winds and laughing waves ; of intimate talk and sweet companionship. The sea

sparkled like a great sapphire, and the few clouds that floated above them only intensified the deep blue of the sky.

Never had the world seemed so beautiful or life so full of promise. Youth and hope ran riot in her veins, and the future was a shining way leading ever on and up to the complete fulfilment of all her dreams. Why this should be she did not pause to inquire. No word passed between them that anyone might not hear. From the moment of their meeting their talk had been quite impersonal ; and yet she desired nothing better. She was content just to be with him, to listen to his voice, to watch the play of his features, to be conscious of a look from him now and then. Had she been wiser in the ways of the world she would have asked to what all this was leading ; but she was too content to worry herself with questions. Any kind of self-examination would have destroyed the beauty of her day-dream. If she desired anything, it was that time should stand still and this beautiful day last for ever.

The first throb of pain came when she discovered that it was quite time she started for home. He did not ask her to stay longer, though he meant to do so himself. He got out her car from amongst a crowd of others ; saw to it that she had plenty of petrol and that the carburetter was in working order ; closed the door when she had taken her seat, and then waited for her to thrust in the clutch and start.

Had he suggested a time and place when and where they should meet again, she would have hailed the suggestion with enthusiasm, but he said nothing about any future meeting. She saw a look in his eyes, as he raised his hat, which she was unable to interpret, and then she was off, with the sea and sunshine behind her.

She dreamed most of the way home, and scarcely spoke a word to Turk. There was beauty by the wayside and in the distance—beauty of rolling moorland and leafy dales, beauty of hedgerow and farmstead—but she saw none of it. Her hands and feet on wheel and levers worked automatically. Subconsciously she saw the whirling fields, the gliding hedges; the villages and hamlets come and go: her real self was elsewhere. Turk was only a shadow; her real companion was Basil Tresillian. She was able to recall every moment she had spent in his company and almost every word he had spoken.

Over the dinner-table that evening she told the story of her day's outing, and made no attempt to hide the fact that amongst the crowd of visitors at Tintagel was Dr. Tresillian. Daniel, however, did not appear to be greatly interested. He had been ailing of late and was getting concerned about his health. Sir John Tresize for the time being had given up worrying him, and he reflected bitterly that if one worry was removed another immediately took its place. As for Phyl, she seemed quite capable of looking after herself, and it was not a bit of use his interfering with her movements even if he wanted to do so.

On the whole he quite approved of the changes she had already made. A capable cook to assist Betty was a step in the right direction. It meant better food and more punctual meals. The extra gardener might possibly pay for himself, and even the motor-car came in handy when he was in a hurry to get to his office, or the weather was particularly bad.

The proposal to build a lodge at the gate he viewed with distrust. It would be, in his judgment, a needless waste of money. He admitted that the present

arrangement of getting out and into the car to open and shut the gate was inconvenient and even irritating ; but what was good enough for her father ought to be good enough for Phyl. Still, it was her concern, and he knew that the sure way to make a woman determined to do a thing was to oppose her : so he wisely held his peace.

After dinner Phyllis indulged Daniel by singing two or three of his favourite songs. He was not feeling well, and was therefore sentimental and inclined to be religious. It was a comfort to "feel" good on occasion. His conception of religion was not "morality touched by emotion," but emotion with morality left out. Perhaps he was not singular in that respect.

Phyllis began with "The Rosary," and almost came to a full stop at the end of the second line—

The hours I spent with thee, dear heart
Are like a string of pearls to me.

A sudden flash of intuition came to her—a sudden clearing away of mists and shadows. The words flamed before her eyes with a new meaning. She was thankful that her back was to her uncle, so that he could not see the swift blush that overspread her face. It was only by a tremendous effort that she pulled herself together and went through with the song to the end.

And then, to make matters worse, he asked her to sing "I hear thee calling me." She tried to see the humorous side of the situation, but it was not easy. Her thoughts got beyond her control in spite of every effort to keep them in leash. Perhaps he was calling to her across the silent spaces. She wished she knew.

"You are in good voice to-night, Phyl," he said, when she had finished, "and you have sung with more feeling than usual."

She blushed again in spite of herself, and then escaped through the drawing-room window into the warm twilight outside.

"Turk, old dear," she said, when she got to the end of the terrace, "if we are not careful we shall become sentimental, and that will never do."

Turk grunted approval and thrust his black nose into her hand.

During the next few days she was kept busy entertaining tennis and croquet parties, and so had little time for introspection. It was only after she retired for the night that her thoughts took wings. She was conscious that the days seemed long without a sight of Tresillian's face, and that all the friends she had in St. Runton were as nothing compared with this one man.

Yet she fought shy of the questions she ought to have asked herself. "Not now," she said. "Some day I shall have to face them."

Then one evening about ten days later the bottom of her little world fell out with a crash, and the castle of her dreams crumbled into dust.

CHAPTER XIV

THE UNEXPECTED

THEY had nearly finished dinner when Daniel said casually, without looking at her, "What is the name, Phyl, of that doctor who brought you home the day you got scared, and afterwards called on you here?"

"Tresillian," she answered, with a slight start. "Basil Tresillian."

"Then he is the same man," he said musingly. "I had not paid much attention to his name."

"Why do you ask?" she inquired, the colour deepening in her cheeks.

He did not answer her question, nor speak again for several moments. Then in the same casual tone:

"Did you know he was married?"

"Married?" she gasped, and she felt the blood draining from her face and her limbs slowly turning to stone.

"Then he did not tell you?"

"Why, no," she said. Her voice seemed to come from a great distance away and was strangely unlike her own.

"Of course, he is no worse for being married," he went on. "Most doctors marry, and quite right, too."

"Yes," she replied. She felt as though someone else spoke for her. All her faculties seemed numbed; she had no will-power left.

"I think, however, he should not have let everybody assume that he was a bachelor without attempting to

enlighten them," he continued. "It might have led to complications, you know."

"Yes?" she said again. She seemed incapable of uttering more than a word at a time.

"You saw him again at Tintagel, I think you told me. Why was he there?"

She struggled hard to get a grip of herself, and in some measure succeeded. "Really, uncle, I don't know," she said in even tones; "I did not ask him."

"A clever fellow, by all accounts—a very clever fellow; but a doctor should know better than put himself in the way of scandal."

"What scandal, uncle?" and the colour crept slowly back into her cheeks again.

"Well, you see, when a married man passes himself off as a bachelor, or at any rate when he hides the fact that he is married, there is bound to be talk directly the truth comes out."

"What sort of talk?"

"Oh, all sorts. People will naturally assume that there is something fishy behind it. Will suspect his motives, you know. Doctors ought to be above suspicion."

"Of course they should. Has he been acting in any way inconsistent with—with——"

"Oh, I don't know that he has," he interrupted. "I know nothing of him, in fact. It hasn't been suggested, as far as I know, that he has been making love to any other woman. But when the truth comes out people will naturally think it queer that he should have kept it dark all this time."

"Then he has admitted that he is married?"

"That I don't know," he laughed. "I was not a bit interested until his name was mentioned. Then it

struck me suddenly that he was possibly the man you had talked about, so naturally I began to make inquiries."

"Yes?"

"Well, I don't know that there is very much beyond what I have already told you. This man with whom I talked—an honest sort of a chap, a Cornish miner, who had spent a good many years in Canada—Petersville was the name of the town: one of those places that spring up suddenly. Oil-fields and all that. Well, it seems that Tresillian had a big practice there. He had married a bar-tender—a fine handsome woman, but something of a vixen, I should judge. Anyhow, it was rumoured that they didn't hit it off very well. Well, about a year ago Tresillian suddenly disappeared—sloped—left his wife in the lurch. Some people thought that he had gone farther West—to Seattle, perhaps, or Vancouver. Others that he had made tracks for the States. Anyhow, Petersville saw no more of him.

"This man—Johns is his name—when he got back to Cornwall, was surprised to find that Tresillian had set up a practice at Redstone and that his Canadian wife was never mentioned."

"But why has not his wife followed him?" Phyllis had gained complete control of herself, though her heart was beating uncomfortably fast.

Daniel shook his head. "As to that," he said, "you know just as much as I do. Possibly she does not know that such a place as Redstone exists. Maybe she is instituting inquiries farther West or in the States, or—since they did not hit it off—she may be glad to be rid of him. There's no knowing. Out in those Western towns they say people marry easily and separate easily. Anyhow, there can be no doubt as to his being a married man."

"Yes," she said dully, and she picked up her napkin and wiped her lips.

"Johns speaks very highly of him. Says he was the cleverest doctor within a radius of five hundred miles, and that he was making money hand over fist. Looks as though he must have been pretty unhappy with his wife to leave all that for the meagre pickings of Redstone."

Phyllis made no further reply. She wanted to be alone; wanted to think, to get her bearings, to find her way about in the darkness that had suddenly enveloped her. She was neither angry nor sorrowful. She was too stunned to feel anything acutely. Life and the world seemed to lie about her in utter ruin. If she desired anything, it was to fall asleep and never wake again.

Sleep, however, was out of the question. She retired early and lay hour after hour with wide-open eyes staring into the darkness. Her brain was so numbed that it was impossible to think clearly or consecutively. Her heart was like a heavy weight, that just ached and ached without cessation.

Towards morning the numbness passed and her mind became clear, but that brought her no relief, it only accentuated her misery. The questions she had put aside and refused to look at hammered persistently at her brain. She could no longer ignore the truth that she had allowed Basil Tresillian to become her world. She had idealised him, worshipped him. He had seemed to her so fine, so splendid, that she had allowed her heart to go out to him unwittingly. Now she had to pay for her folly. Of course the fault was all hers. She ought to have been on her guard—ought to have seen whither she was drifting, and pulled herself up in time. No self-respecting girl should allow herself to think about

a man until he had given her some sign that he wanted her.

Then her heart rose in protest and in self-defence. She was *not* to blame. He ought to have told her that he was already married. It was not fair to her to let her think that he was free. He knew that she was only a girl with little or no experience of the world. It was mean of him to take advantage of her youth.

But had he taken advantage? The pendulum swung back again. How was he likely to guess that she would be so silly? He had never attempted to flirt with her. He had been just friendly as any other man might be. She had no right to expect that he would confide to her his domestic troubles. His behaviour had been correct in every way.

No, it was not his fault. It was just a cruel and malicious joke that had caught her in its toils. It was part of the irony of life and the wrongness of the world. Life was not a shining way, as she had thought, but a wilderness path, steep and thorny, and swept by bitter storms.

The light of dawn crept slowly into her room and the sparrows began to twitter under the eaves, and then she fell asleep.

She woke with a start when Lucy came with her morning tea.

"Oh, why did you wake me, Lucy?" she said fretfully. "I was having such a lovely sleep."

"It's the usual time, miss," and Lucy walked across the room and drew up the blinds, "and the weather's a fair treat," she added as she returned.

Phyllis could see the pinnacles of St. Runton's tower shining like silver spears, and the dew-drenched leaves sparkled like diamonds, but the sight brought her no

comfort. The ache in her heart had come back again. Her world lay in ruins.

She felt a little better when she had swallowed a cup of tea. She would have to put on a bold front and meet the world with a smiling face. No one must ever know or even suspect.

A little later pride came to her help. Then a sense of shame overwhelmed her. What would her friends think if they knew she cared for a married man? Oh, it was absurd—ridiculous. She would tear his image from her heart. She would forget him—perhaps grow to hate him.

When afternoon came she went and sat under the copper beech with her sewing. No more motor-rides for a day or two. There was always the off-chance that she might meet him, and she did not want to meet him yet—not until she had got a complete mastery of herself. It would be impossible to avoid him altogether unless she shut herself within the boundary-walls of Pendare. Suppose he called! Her heart gave a sudden thump and she laid her work in her lap.

She would have to see him, of course. He had done nothing—said nothing—to which she could take exception. She was not supposed to know that he had deserted his wife. She would have to receive him as she would receive the vicar, or Mr. Weekes, or Peter Ruddock, or any other man of her acquaintance. Only she would have to be on her guard—very polite and affable—outwardly friendly; but there must be no more serious or intimate talks, and he must never guess that she had ever thought of him as anything more than just an ordinary acquaintance.

With a long-drawn sigh she picked up her work and went on with her sewing. Turk, who lay at her feet,

grunted, and looked up at her affectionately out of his big, bulging eyes ; but as she took no notice of him, he scrambled to his feet and pushed his nose into her lap.

“What is it, you darling ?” she questioned, and patted his head.

Turk sniffed and wagged his stumpy tail.

“Do you understand, dear, that I am not very happy to-day ?” and two tears dropped suddenly into her lap.

Turk tried to lick her hand.

“I shall get over it,” she went on ; “at least I hope I shall. Time, they say, heals all wounds, and perhaps time will be kind to me. You will be faithful, anyhow,” and she patted his head once more. “Now, dear, lie down again.”

Turk obeyed at once, and a moment later he was again curled up at her feet.

It was a still, windless afternoon. The tree-tops scarcely stirred. From distant fields came the sound of reaping-machines, and now and then the hoot of a motor-horn along the high-road. These were the only sounds that broke the stillness.

Suddenly Turk gave a growl and started to his feet, and looking up Phyllis saw Basil Tresillian advancing across the lawn.

For a moment her heart seemed to stand still, then it began to pound against her side like a steam-hammer. By a tremendous effort she pulled herself together and stood up. When he came near she held out her hand and smiled.

“How are you ?” she questioned. “Isn’t it a lovely day ?”

Had he been less nervous he would have felt that there was something wrong. Her greeting lacked warmth and spontaneity, and her smile was forced and artificial.

"I am well, thank you," he smiled. "And you?"

"Oh, I am splendid. As I once told you, I never ail anything."

"Fortunate for you. . . . And your uncle?"

"He is not at all well. . . . Nothing serious, I think. He refuses, anyhow, to see a doctor."

"These still, hot days are a little trying," he said, and then stopped short. He could think of nothing more to say.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked.

He was conscious then that some subtle change had come over her.

"Suppose we take a walk round the garden?" he suggested.

"Much too fatiguing," she answered, with a light laugh, and she dropped back into her chair.

He looked at her with a puzzled expression. Was it maiden shyness? Did she guess why he had come? Or had she grown indifferent? At Tintagel her eyes were soft and welcoming, now they were hard and cold; then her smile was like sunshine, now it was forced and unnatural.

Should he turn and go back again, leaving the words he had come to say unspoken? Or should he take the plunge and put an end to what had become a very disturbing uncertainty? His welcome certainly was not what he had expected. He had rehearsed what he had meant to say, and imagined that he would have no difficulty in getting out the words. Now he found himself almost tongue-tied.

It was not his nature, however, to jib at fences. He had come for an express purpose and he would go through with it.

"Please do sit down," she said, without meeting his eyes.

He made no attempt, however, to obey her. For another moment he stood as if irresolute, then he said quietly : " I came this afternoon for a special purpose."

" Yes ? " she questioned.

" You must have guessed that I love you," he went on. " I *do* love you, deeply, passionately, and I have come to ask you to be my wife."

Had a bomb exploded under her chair she could scarcely have been more startled or amazed. This was worse than anything she had ever imagined. That a man who was already married should propose marriage to her was an intolerable insult. How she had been mistaken in the man—how terribly mistaken !

She sprang to her feet and stood before him rigid, almost frozen.

" Dr. Tresillian," she gasped, " how dare you ? "

" When a man loves a woman as I love you," he answered, " he will dare anything. Moreover, I had hoped——"

" Will you kindly leave me ? " she interrupted passionately.

" Leave you ? " he questioned in astonishment.

" That is my wish. And please never speak to me again."

" But surely," he protested, " some kind of explanation is due to me. What have I done—— ? "

She raised her hand and pointed toward the gate.

" If you have any respect for my feelings," she said in a low voice, " you will go at once."

" If that is your desire, of course——"

" It is my desire."

She had got to the end of her tether, and felt that if the interview was continued a minute longer she would collapse.

He raised his hat, and without another word turned on his heel and walked away.

She sank back suddenly in her chair and watched his retreating figure. She wondered vaguely if he would turn for a farewell look. Even then she longed to cry to him to come back. It might be wicked—she did not know—but never had she so passionately longed for him as at that moment. He did not look back, however. He walked steadily on, without any sign of haste, until the trees hid him from view. A few minutes later she heard the faint hum of his motor-car, then all grew still again.

“So ends my dream,” she gasped. And she rose and made her way unsteadily toward the house.

CHAPTER XV

SHADOWS

PHYLLIS had one consoling thought : Basil Tresillian had come with his avowal the day after she had heard of his marriage. Had he come the day before, how bitter would be her humiliation now ! She made no attempt to blink the facts. If he had proposed marriage to her yesterday, she would have said yes without a moment's hesitation, and felt herself the happiest woman in the world. She would have yielded her lips to his kisses, and confessed to him without reserve the greatness of her love.

Mercifully he had delayed his visit that extra day ; but by how narrow a margin had been her escape ; from what a terrible humiliation she had been saved—and saved by the skin of her teeth ! Instead of feeling depressed and heartbroken, she ought to rejoice. Instead of mourning over a broken idol, she ought to be giving God thanks that she had discovered its hollowness in time.

But while she admitted all this and tried her best to rise above her depression, she could neither rejoice nor be thankful. There was nothing to exult over in discovering that her idol had feet of clay ; nothing to brighten life in discovering that another man in whom she had believed was not to be trusted.

She did her best to show a smiling face to the world. She went about her work with a show of good-humour

and cheerfulness. She entertained her friends to tea and tennis, and gave up her motor-rides so that she might practise at the net. She forced herself to be gay when people were about, and her laugh gave no indication of the sadness of her heart.

She thought of Basil Tresillian, not with anger, but with sorrow. It seemed so pitiful that a man so fine in many ways—so cultured and so clever—should be so weak and even cowardly.

Sometimes she was afraid that she might grow cynical. She told herself that she had done with love. She had broken her precious box of spikenard and it could never be refilled. Henceforth she must go her way alone. Whom could she trust? Her faith in mankind had been shaken to its foundations. She felt strangely friendless and alone. Even her uncle had failed her. Only the Colonel was left, and he lived so far away that she rarely saw him. It was true that now she could talk to him occasionally over the telephone; but her latest trouble she could not confide even to him.

The brilliant harvest weather broke at length in torrential rain. The clouds bent down to the hill-tops; the trees dripped and dripped without cessation; the tennis-lawns gathered pools of water; the leat gurgled loudly in the glen.

Phyllis welcomed the change. Nature's mood was in harmony with her own. She watched the drifting rain and the lowering sky with a curious feeling of satisfaction. The brilliant sunshine, while it lasted, had mocked her misery: now Nature wept in sympathy with her despair.

Daniel Teague, instead of getting better, had got steadily worse. Dr. Blake, whom at length he had called in, was frankly puzzled. Such a rapid loss of strength

accompanied by so much pain indicated something serious.

Daniel spent most of his time in the library alone. He had gone to his office as long as he had strength. At first he dropped an hour, or two hours, out of each day, then he began dropping a day out of each week, then two days, then three, till at length he ceased going altogether.

Phyllis offered to sit with him or read to him, but he would not hear of it. He liked being alone, he told her, and when he felt in the mood for books he could read himself. Talk seemed to distress him, so he dwelt alone with his thoughts and memories, but what they were he confided to no one.

This new anxiety switched Phyllis's thoughts away from her own troubles. She began to worry much more about Daniel than about herself. At first she had felt no real alarm. He rarely complained, and for a long time he refused to see a doctor ; but when at length he gave up going to his office and Dr. Blake came to see him every day, she knew that something serious threatened.

And yet for a long time she was unable to bring herself to believe that his life was in actual danger. He would get well again. It was all a matter of time and patience. Elderly people did not pick up their strength as young people did ; moreover, she had great faith in the skill of Dr. Blake.

She busied herself in getting food that would tempt his appetite. She waited on him herself. She told him the gossip of the neighbourhood, and fussed about him as much as he would permit ; but in spite of everything his strength steadily lessened.

When he took to staying in bed altogether and the doctor insisted on a hospital nurse, Phyllis was bound to

face the possibility of his death, and her future took on a more sombre hue than ever. It seemed only too true that troubles rarely came singly; often, indeed, they came in battalions.

One morning Dr. Blake took her aside and told her frankly that he feared her uncle's days were numbered. He had tried every remedy that he could think of, and he would like, with her permission, to have a second opinion.

"By all means," she said, with frightened eyes. "I should never forgive myself if we neglected any possible chance."

"Then to-morrow or the day after," he said, "I will bring another doctor with me. I know one exceptionally clever man, and it will be a satisfaction to have someone to share with me the responsibility."

When he had gone Phyllis sank into a chair and for the first time gave way to a flood of tears. She had kept hoping against hope, welcoming every momentary sign of improvement, praying daily and hourly that she might not be left utterly alone. Now she knew that her last hope had expired and that she was to be more completely orphaned than ever before.

For the rest of the day she moved about the house like an uneasy ghost. She could settle to nothing. The thought of the future frightened her. To be alone in that big house through the long dreary evenings and nights of the coming winter was a prospect too appalling to be contemplated.

Yet what was the alternative? Either she would have to give up Pendare and go and live in some little villa in the town where her neighbours would be close at hand, or else she would have to have a companion who would be with her all the time.

Then a fresh hope stole into her heart. Perhaps the new doctor, when he came to-morrow, would discover the cause of her uncle's illness and prescribe some treatment that would cure him.

She never knew how much her uncle had stood for until now, never realised how much she had leaned on him. The mere fact that he was in the house had been a consolation. He had been company even when he shut himself up in the library alone. He had never showed her much affection, never entered into her joys or sorrows, never made a confidant of her, and yet somehow his presence had been sustaining. His removal would leave a gap that no one else could fill.

The following day she waited anxiously for the arrival of the new doctor. She had built her last hope on his visit. Dr. Blake had said that he was exceptionally clever ; he might, therefore, discover something or suggest something that would start her uncle once more on the way to health. If he failed, there would be nothing left to hope for.

She was sitting in one of the drawing-room windows in the warmth of the September sunshine when Dr. Blake's car appeared. She stood up at once with quickened heart-beats and watched from behind a curtain. Dr. Blake was the first to alight, and was immediately followed by the stranger.

Phyllis drew back with a little gasp and pressed her hand to her side. For a moment or two the two men stood talking before ringing the door-bell, but Phyllis had no eyes for Dr. Blake, she saw only Basil Tresillian. Tall, upright, with his lean intellectual face and his clear grey eyes, he made a striking, even an impressive, figure. What her emotions were she could not have told even to herself. They swept the entire gamut

as one might sweep the keys of a piano or the strings of a harp.

When the door-bell rang she sat down and tried to stop the loud beating of her heart. Life was becoming more and more cruel to her. That he of all men should be called in as her last hope seemed the apotheosis of irony. For a month she had been trying to forget him—trying to crush out the love that had changed her world, trying to rise above the human weakness that threatened to engulf her in a flood of despair; and now in a moment all her defences had gone down with a crash.

She might be weak, she might even be wicked, she could not help it. Her heart was stronger than her reason, her love greater than her pride, her pity more compelling than her contempt. In spite of its feet of clay her idol still stood erect and supreme. She found excuses for him that she would have denied for herself. In his youth he had been trapped and betrayed. He had found out his mistake when it was too late. He had tried to shake off his fetters, and in his love for her had persuaded himself that they did not exist.

For mistakes there was no forgiveness and no redemption. Sin might be forgiven, transgressions might be blotted out, but mistakes carried their penalty, which had to be paid to the uttermost farthing.

She heard 'Lijah open the door, then footsteps in the hall and on the stairs.

“What am I to do?” she said, wringing her hands.

“I cannot see him—dare not. Surely he will not wish to see me. He must guess that I know, and if he has any sense of honour or shame he will avoid me at all costs.”

After waiting a few moments, she stole into the hall.

'Lijah was just coming out of the dining-room with a basket of cutlery in his hand.

"I am going to my workroom upstairs," she said, trying to keep her voice steady. "When Dr. Blake comes down, tell him that I wish to see him in my room—you understand?"

"Yes, miss."

Phyllis's boudoir, or workroom, as she preferred to call it, was directly above the hall. It was a pleasant room with an oriel window which commanded a wide view of the surrounding country. Standing in the window and looking down, she could see the doctor's car standing a few feet away from the porch.

She made no attempt to work or read. She did not even sit down. She was too anxious and perturbed. Her heart was still pounding against her side, her breath came and went in gasps, her brain was in a tumult. The mere thought that Basil Tresillian was in the house was sufficient to destroy her peace of mind, apart from her anxiety concerning her uncle.

After what seemed an interminable time she heard a door open and shut, then the murmur of voices on the landing outside, which gradually died away as the speakers descended the stairs.

She pulled open her door and waited. She caught the sound of 'Lijah's voice, then quick footsteps ascending the stairs. A moment later Dr. Blake was following her into the room. She turned and faced him with questioning eyes and lips apart.

"I am sorry I can say nothing beyond what I have already told you," he said quietly. "Dr. Tresillian has made a very careful examination, and his diagnosis agrees with mine in every particular. He is unable to suggest any different treatment."

“Then there is no hope?” she questioned, with a little gasp.

“There is always hope while there is life,” he assured her.

“But he holds out no hope?”

“He has not said so.”

“Will he come again?”

“I think not. There is no reason why he should do so.”

She drew in a long breath, then held out her hand. “Thank you, doctor,” and her eyes filled.

When he had gone she walked to the window and looked down. Tresillian was standing by the car talking to the chauffeur. He looked quite unconcerned and there was no sign of unhappiness in his face. She felt almost angry that he should be so self-possessed while she was thrilling in every nerve. Had he forgotten her already? Was it nothing to him that she might be watching him from one of the windows? Had he ceased to care for her? Had he ever cared?

He turned towards the door with a smile on his lips—one of those grave smiles that made his face so attractive. He did not look like a man who had anything on his conscience, and it seemed almost inconceivable that he should have proposed what was not only morally but legally wrong. Were all men hypocrites and deceivers?

Through a mist of tears she saw him enter the car followed by Dr. Blake. The door was closed with a click. The chauffeur thrust in the clutch, and with a slight jerk the car leaped forward and disappeared behind the trees.

How long she stood in the window looking out across the woods and fields she did not know. The beauty of the landscape no longer appealed to her, or, rather, she

did not see it. What she saw was a bleak and lonely road leading into the unknown.

She felt old and tired and out of heart. The world had become hard and unfriendly. Over the house hung the grim shadow of death. Her uncle was her last remaining relative, and he was passing out into the great silence. When he was gone she would be utterly alone.

Only two short months ago she had celebrated her birthday. Then she was happier than the birds, glad to be alive, brimming over with mirth and laughter. Life had seemed a golden trail leading through green meadows and by shining streams, and all the future was steeped in sunshine. Two months ago *he* had beckoned and love had begun to sing. Now he had gone and the song had been choked into silence.

With a strong effort she pulled herself together and went and changed into a fresh dress, then made her way to her uncle's room.

He was lying propped up with pillows looking worn and exhausted. During the last month he had aged ten years in appearance. He looked a little wizened old man.

"That you, Phyl?" he said feebly, and the shadow of a smile stole over his face. "I'm glad you've come."

"Yes, uncle."

He turned to the nurse who stood on the other side of the bed. "You can leave us for a while," he said, "and don't come back till you are called."

She left the room at once and closed the door softly behind her.

"Now draw up your chair near me, little girl. I've a lot to say to you, and I've not much time to say it in." He spoke briskly and with a kind of impatience, as though he had come to a sudden resolution and was afraid that his courage might fail before his task was completed.

"You must not tire yourself, uncle," she said, sitting close by his side and taking his wasted hand in hers.

"Don't interrupt me"—he frowned. "It isn't a pleasant job, but I've got to go through with it. Now listen!"

CHAPTER XVI

CONFESSION

DANIEL did not speak again for several minutes. He lay with puckered forehead and half-closed eyes, as if uncertain where or how to begin.

"I've been a bad uncle to you, little girl," he suddenly blurted out—"a very bad uncle."

"No, no!" she protested. "You have always been good to me."

"Don't interrupt," he retorted. "I know what I'm talking about. My desires have been all right, but I've always been weak. But for the Colonel I should have cheated you again and again, as I've cheated Tresize—not willingly—but I should have gambled with your money as I've gambled with everything, and gamblers nearly always lose in the end. I've tried to pull up time after time, but it's never been a bit of use. Whenever the chance came for a fling I took it. That's how Tresize managed to get his thumb on me. I never meant to defraud him, of course, but he found out before I was ready for him, and then he was down on me and demanded his price. . . . And you were the price——"

"I don't understand, uncle."

"You will directly. He could have sent me to prison, you see—I was completely in his power; but he wanted you, little girl—or your money . . . perhaps he wanted both. In his way I think he is fond of you. Anyhow, I had to help. It was that or prison. Now you under-

stand why I wanted you to invite him and his mother to dinner, why I wanted you to be on friendly terms with him, why I encouraged him to come here. Don't suppose it did not go against the grain. I hated it, hated him, and hated myself worst of all. But there I was : bound hand and foot. I've been ashamed to look you in the face. I've made myself drunk so that I might forget the cad I was . . ."

"Oh, uncle !"

"I hadn't the courage to tell you before. Now it doesn't matter. Tresize can't touch me now. I'm beyond his clutches. In a day or two at the outside I shall be dead——"

"No, no, uncle ! don't say that."

"But I do say it. The doctors know it. You know it. I know it. That's the reason I'm telling you these things now. I couldn't die easily without letting you know. I don't expect you to forgive me. Why should you ?"

"But I do forgive you, uncle. I do, I do——"

"You mean that ?"

"Of course I do. How can I expect to be forgiven unless I forgive ?" And she gave way suddenly to a tempest of tears.

"Don't cry, little girl," he pleaded ; "you'll upset me if you do, and I haven't finished my story yet."

"Oh, but, uncle, you've always meant well by me. I'm sure you have, and you've always loved me. If you've been weak sometimes and fallen into temptation——"

"That's just it," he interrupted. "I've always been weak. I've seen the right road clear enough—what my mother used to call the shining way—but I've never had the courage to tread it. There was always an easier way

from my point of view, and yet it has never proved easier in the end. As I see it now, the wrong way is always the hard way. God alone knows what I have suffered during the last few months."

She patted his hand gently and struggled hard to keep back her tears.

"You've been a good girl, Phyl," he went on, "and that's what made it so hard for me to plot against you. If you'd been like a lot of women—vain, selfish, and hungry for a title—I wouldn't have minded. Most girls to-day would jump at Tresize . . ."

"No, no, uncle," she sobbed.

"Well, you may be right," he conceded after a pause. "I've never had much use for women—at least for many years. I was enamoured once. She was pretty, too—awfully pretty—at least I thought so. I suppose I idealised her. We had made all arrangements to get married, and I was just bubbling over with pride and happiness, and then she suddenly flung me over and married an old roué with tons of money. It was a knock-out blow, I can tell you; and I vowed that I would never be caught by a woman again. I assumed that they were all alike—that all they cared for was money, and clothes, and a fine house, and all that kind of thing. You see, Phyl, I was not the right kind of man to be the guardian of a girl; and on the whole I've made a mess of it——"

"No, no, uncle. Please don't say that."

"But I must say it," he protested, "for it's true. If I haven't ruined your life, it's not for want of trying. You don't know what it is to be under the thumb of a scoundrel. It's a good job I'm finished with——"

"Please, uncle, don't," she sobbed.

"I mean it, Phyl. I should have had to keep on

plotting. Now I can warn you instead. Tresize hasn't given up hope——"

"How absurd of him!"

"You remember that story I told you about Dr. Tresillian having a wife in Canada?"

"Well?"

"That was all part of Tresize's game."

"Tresize's game?" she gasped. "How? What do you mean?"

"Well, he was afraid that Tresillian might prove a rival, don't you see? He figured it out that you were young and romantic, that Tresillian was a taking fellow, handsome and clever and all that, who had carried you off from under his nose, and so won your gratitude. Also he discovered somehow that you had met each other since, and that there was a risk of something coming of it. You see how things would look to Tresize."

"Well?" she gasped impatiently. Her eyes were bulging, her lips apart, her breath coming and going in hurried respirations.

"The squire's game, of course, was to spike Tresillian's guns," Daniel went on after a pause. "He had found out all there was to be known about the doctor—about his being in Canada and how he had come back on the death of his father to look after his old mother. He preferred not to believe that. Anyhow, he saw his chance and took it. He had only to invent the story of his having married a vixen and run away and left her and the thing was done. He knew very well that if you believed the doctor was married it would be all right. You see, Tresize is one of those men who believe that all is fair in love and war——"

She did not reply for several moments. She felt too utterly aghast to speak. The whole plot was so cowardly

and contemptible that she seemed unable to grasp its full significance. There were so many implications that her brain was bewildered.

"Let me be quite clear, uncle," she said presently, striving hard to keep her voice steady. "I am to understand that Dr. Tresillian is not married?"

"As far as I know he isn't."

"You mean that the story is a fabrication?"

"Exactly."

"Invented by Sir John Tresize?"

"No doubt about it."

"And when you told me the story you knew it was a lie?"

"Well, no—not exactly, though I had made a pretty shrewd guess——"

"And yet you told it to me as though you believed it?"

"What could I do, child?" and there was a tone of vast regret in his voice. "I was helpless—bound hand and foot. He had it in his power to ruin me at any moment. He told me in this house that unless I carried out his wishes he would break me like a rotten stick, crush me as he would crush a fly; and he would have done it. Besides, it wasn't my story I was telling, and whether it was true or not, it wouldn't make much difference to anybody."

"Not much difference, uncle?" her voice was steady, though her heart was in a tumult.

"Well, you see, Phyl, you had not known the doctor long enough to get very deeply interested in him——"

"Never mind me, uncle," she interrupted, with a note of impatience in her voice. "Was slandering a public man—a rising doctor—a matter of no importance?"

"Oh, well, you see, the story would never get beyond you, unless you have talked about it."

"Of course I have not talked about it."

"Then it's dead. It'll get no farther."

"But I don't understand."

"You see, as I have made it out, Tresize invented the story and primed Johns—if that's his name—to relate it to me. I pass it on to you—I had to—and that's the end of it. There's nothing gained by letting it go any farther. Tresillian will never hear of it unless you tell him."

"And what's to prevent my telling him?"

"Nothing as far as I am concerned. The moment I am out of the way you can tell him the whole story, if you like. Tresize can't harm me now. I've got beyond his reach."

"But why need you have pained me, uncle, with this dreadful story?"

"Because, child," he said, with more emotion than he had yet shown, "I wanted it off my mind. It's worried me a lot. Now that I've made a clean breast of everything I feel better. You see what a bad man I have been; and yet God knows I have loved you and wanted to protect you. You will never know in what a state of torment I have lived. Though I know I'm a dying man, I'm really happier than I've been for months—ay, for years."

To this she had no reply to make. She could not tell him that the lie about Basil Tresillian had touched her more cruelly than all the rest. He had assumed that Tresillian was nothing to her, and she could not enlighten him. That was her secret known only to herself and God. Sir John Tresize had gained his immediate object—he had built a wall between her and

the man she loved—a wall that she would never be able to scale. By his cunning and treachery he had spoiled her life, but he should never have the satisfaction of knowing what he had done. She would still meet the world with a smile on her lips.

Daniel's voice broke in on her reflections : " Do you think, Phyl, that God is less merciful than His creatures ? " he questioned.

" Why, no, uncle. God is much more merciful than we are," she answered.

He smiled feebly and was silent for several moments. " That is how I make it out," he said presently. " If you have forgiven me, Phyl, I don't think God will turn me down."

She wondered at that moment if in her heart she had forgiven him. Her only excuse for him was that he did not know. He could not guess what she was suffering. He had dealt her the cruellest blow she had ever known or ever could know, but he had not meant it. She would have to try always to remember that, or else her pain might degenerate into hatred.

As he made no further attempt to continue the conversation, she rose from her chair and silently left the room.

She heard the voice of Mr. Weekes in the hall—he had called frequently of late to see her uncle—but she felt she could not meet him to-day. She could not meet anyone. She needed time to recover herself. Her brain was in a tumult ; her heart ached with a pain that was almost intolerable.

Going to her workroom, she threw herself into an easy-chair and tried to think, but thinking brought her no comfort. She almost wished that her uncle had kept silent. His confession had only increased the tangle of

her life. What did it matter to her now that her idol had been restored to its original position ? How could it help her to know that Basil Tresillian was a man upon whose life and character there was no shadow of a stain ? She had spurned the love he had offered her ; driven him from her presence with scorn, and refused a single word of explanation.

Surely she had been mad. Against the witness of her own heart she had accepted the slander as gospel truth. If only she had been more patient, more generous, more charitable. If only she had listened to his appeal and given him the reason for her refusal, he would have countered the lie and brought confusion on his slanderers ; but in her hurt pride and vanity she had given him no chance. She had judged and condemned without listening to a word in his defence. Now she was paying the penalty and would have to go on paying the penalty to the end of her life.

It seemed to her as though foolishness were worse than wickedness, and received the greater punishment. The knaves of the piece—Sir John Tresize and her uncle—went unscathed ; while she, who had been foolish only, bore all the punishment.

When dinner-time came she went listlessly down the broad staircase, and during the meal kept up a desultory conversation with the night-nurse ; but all the savour seemed to have gone out of her life. The things that had interested her interested her no longer. Nothing mattered. Her life had been spoiled beyond hope of recovery.

After dinner Peter Ruddock came with the Pendare letters that had been left at the office ; also with some business letters which he wished Daniel to see. While he was absent in Daniel's bedroom Phyllis scanned her

own letters. The first on which her eye lighted was from an old schoolfellow—Rachel Drew—with whom she had kept up a fairly regular correspondence. Of all the friends she had made at school, Rachel stood easily first.

There was nothing of particular interest in Rachel's letter. For a year past she had been earning her living as companion to an old lady. Now, however, she was home again with her parents, the old lady having died.

"When I have rested awhile," the latter went on, "and replenished my scanty wardrobe, I shall of course look out for another situation. The parents have enough girls at home without me——"

At this point Phyllis laid down the letter and stared into the fire. She had considered the question of a companion more than once, but curiously she had never thought of Rachel. Rachel was her equal; nay, at school she had always looked up to her, as being the cleverest girl in their form; hence the idea of asking her to be a paid companion had not occurred to her.

Yet why not? Of all the people in the world Rachel most appealed to her. And if Rachel had to be companion to somebody—if this was the way she chose of earning her own living—why should she not live at Pendare?

Phyllis was conscious of a sudden quickening of her interest in life. Rachel would make existence tolerable. Rachel never moped, never lost heart, never gave way to pessimism, never failed to see the rainbow in the cloud.

Before Peter returned from interviewing her uncle, Phyllis had written her letter and sealed it.

"If you will post this letter for me I shall be obliged," she said, looking up with a wan smile.

"With pleasure, miss," Peter answered. Then after

a moment : " Mr. Teague is very ill. It looks to me as if he is not going to get better."

" You think he is worse ? " she questioned.

" He seems much weaker than when I saw him three evenings ago, though he is more cheerful."

" Is there much work at the office ? " she questioned.

" Not more than I can manage," he said reflectively.

" You see, I am qualified now."

" Yes, I know. My uncle told me. I congratulate you, Peter."

" Thank you, miss. If there is anything I can do for you——"

" You may be able to do many things for me later on," she said quietly.

" Anything, miss . . . I shall count it a privilege. . . . You see, I understand most of your uncle's affairs, and—and—it will be a great pleasure to serve you."

" Thank you, Peter."

When he had gone, Phyllis dropped into her chair with a smile on her lips. The world seemed a little less dark than it had been an hour before.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GREATEST THING

DANIEL lingered on for several weeks, and then peacefully and quite painlessly "fell on sleep."

During those weeks the religious side of his nature seemed to blossom into complete flower. He welcomed the visits of the vicar and Mr. Weekes with every sign of pleasure, and audibly responded to the prayers they put up by his bedside ; but best of all, he loved to have the church choir sing in the hall his favourite hymns and anthems. When the clear voices of the boys floated, slightly muted, through his open door, tears would run down his cheeks and his face would light up with beatific smiles. The vicar was delighted with these evidences of grace and piety. "He was a much worthier man than we knew," he confided to his curate. "His piety, like the violet, bloomed unseen."

And yet, curiously, there was no quickening of his moral sense. After making his confession to Phyllis and receiving her forgiveness he worried no more about his sins. The fact that he had converted twelve hundred pounds of Tresize's money to his own use troubled him not at all ; on the contrary, he derived considerable satisfaction from the thought that he had got the better of the baronet. Sir John had used him as his tool, threatened him, insulted him, poured contempt on him again and again, therefore he felt justified in "besting" him. Sir John could not touch him now. That thought yielded him unspeakable comfort. The baronet might flourish his promissory note in the face of his executors,

but Daniel knew that his estate would scarcely realise sufficient to pay funeral expenses, hence the squire might whistle for his money, and Daniel inwardly chuckled at the thought.

It is not suggested that Daniel was singular in this. There are many people who appear unable to distinguish between religion and righteousness.

When word was brought to Phyllis that in the very early hours of the morning her uncle had passed out into the great silence, she shed a few tears, but not many. She felt sad rather than sorrowful. She had never loved him greatly, and yet she could not lightly put aside the pathos of his death. His life had been so futile, so purposeless. He had lived for nearly threescore years and yet he had done nothing, achieved nothing, contributed nothing to the betterment of the world. He had not been a bad man—outwardly at any rate—his vices had sprung from weakness rather than from intention. He had loved her in his way—not deeply or passionately ; he had wanted to do his duty by her, had wanted to protect her from the machinations of an evil man, and yet because of weakness and cowardice had done the very opposite. He had helped when he should have hindered, cursed where he should have blessed.

It was all very pitiful and tragic. She wanted to think well of him, but it was very difficult. His confession had left an indelible stain upon his memory. The eulogies of Mr. Weekes and the vicar—so kindly meant—stabbed her almost with a sense of shame.

In those trying days she found her friend Rachel Drew an unspeakable comfort. Rachel had started for Pendare directly she received Phyllis's letter. Up to then she had been bemoaning the death of the old lady to whom she had been companion. Situations were so

difficult to get. Girls, alas ! were so plentiful, and her father, who was a country solicitor, had enough to do to make both ends meet. Phyllis's letter was like a burst of sunshine in a day of storm.

"Hurrah !" she shouted, to the astonishment of all the other members of the family. "Fortune still favours the brave, or the fair, or the deserving, or whatever it is—not that I'm either—but I'm fortunate, all the same. Listen to this," and she read the letter aloud, after which she did a fox-trot round the room.

She did not wait to replenish her wardrobe, but began to pack at once.

"I'm off before Phyl has time to change her mind," she explained to her mother. "'Strike while the iron is hot,' is my motto." And before nightfall she and Phyllis were embracing each other on the platform of St. Runton station.

"It is good of you to come," Phyllis said as they drove away together in the two-seater, Turk sitting upright between them.

"Good !" Rachel exclaimed. "I'd have come sooner had I known you wanted me."

"And now that you've come I'm going to keep you."

"As long as you like," was the laughing answer, "and the longer the better."

"You'll find Pendare frightfully dull, I'm afraid," Phyllis went on. "Uncle is bedridden, as I told you, and I fear will never recover. I've grown to be a perfect shrew, as you will soon find out. Turk at present is about the only cheerful member of the family, and he's often as solemn as a judge——"

Turk snorted in protest and showed his teeth in what was evidently intended to be a cheerful grin.

"Is your mistress slandering you ?" Rachel laughed,

stroking the back of his head. "We won't have it, will we?" At which Turk sniffed and tried to lick her hand.

Rachel quickly settled herself in her new quarters. She was one of those bright, clever, tactful young women who seem to know by instinct what to do and what not to do. Before a week had passed Phyllis had begun to wonder how she had ever done without her.

The day after Daniel's death the Colonel drove over and remained till after the funeral. Peter Ruddock made himself indispensable. Phyllis had only to express a wish and it was done. Rachel was always at hand when she was wanted. Peter confided to his mother that Miss Phyllis's companion was the most understanding young woman he had ever met.

Daniel was laid to rest amid considerable pomp, nearly everybody of importance attended the funeral, including Sir John Tresize. The vicar delivered a eulogy over the grave that would have greatly astonished Daniel had he been permitted to hear it, and then——

Well, the world went on as though nothing had happened. One life more or less in a world so crowded made no appreciable difference. In a few days Daniel was forgotten.

Basil Tresillian had debated with himself for some considerable time whether or not he should attend the funeral or whether he should leave cards; finally he decided on doing neither. One visit to Daniel was not sufficient justification or sufficient excuse; and leaving cards might be deemed an impertinence. So he stayed away, though he longed very ardently for a sight of Phyllis's face.

For a week or two after his dismissal he tried hard to put her out of his thoughts, but he had discovered that

that was hopeless. He could as easily forget his mother. He might have succeeded better had not Phyllis so piqued his curiosity. For the life of him he could not understand why she had treated him in such a cavalier fashion. Day after day and night after night the question haunted him. Why? Why? What had he done? What had he said? What had happened? There was some reason, of course, but try as he would he could not find it. Did she dislike him? Had she something against him? Was she a flirt? Did she consider herself his social superior? Was she in love with someone else? But all these suggestions he dismissed in turn. Neither singly nor collectively did they offer any sufficient reason for the angry and emphatic manner in which she had dismissed him. Moreover, he did not believe that she disliked him, neither could she have anything against him. He reviewed his conduct from the first and was quite satisfied that it had been correct in every particular. That she was a flirt he could not bring himself to believe, and even if she were in love with someone else that did not justify her in practically ordering him off the premises. So his thoughts travelled round and round in a circle like a cork in a whirlpool, and he got no nearer to a solution of the problem.

If she had only given him a reason—any kind of reason—adequate or inadequate, he might have taken his dismissal philosophically and in time put her out of his mind; but the tantalising question, Why? Why? was always present and made life a torment.

Pride helped him a little, but not very much. Love laughs at pride, as it laughs at most other things, including logic and common sense.

He had fallen in love at first sight. That, of course, was a ridiculous thing to do. His reason told him that

a man of his years and experience ought to have known better. To fall in love under any circumstances might be a foolish thing, but to fall in love at sight was sheer lunacy. By no process of reasoning could it be justified.

What did he know of her?—her antecedents, her upbringing, her character, her temper, her disposition, her attainments? Then what had he fallen in love with?

Reason was baulked at every turn and his common sense affronted. A mere chit of a girl whom he had never seen before—who by her foolishness had got herself into danger, and he by the merest fluke had helped her out of it. What in the name of common sense was there in that to cause him to lose his heart to her? He had to admit to himself that neither reason, nor logic, nor common sense had any part or lot in the matter. The fact remained, however, that, willy-nilly, he did fall in love with her at their very first meeting, and that he was desperately in love with her still.

She was dainty, no doubt, and piquant, and even pretty, but so were hundreds of other girls. He had met them by the score both in England and Canada, and not one of them had quickened by a second his normal heart-beat. And yet the moment this girl looked up into his face with her frightened eyes he felt himself her slave. He was ready to do anything for her. Ready to go with her to the ends of the earth, if she wished it.

All the way to Redstone he had felt like a man in a dream. If an angel had dropped into the seat by his side direct from heaven he could not have been more thrilled. Her nearness intoxicated him, the scent of her hair sent the blood galloping through his veins like a mill-race, her voice was like music. All very foolish, no doubt, but how was one to combat facts?

He had tried to behave as any normal individual

should, and believed he had succeeded. He had spoken sternly to her, and mildly chaffed her ; and when he reached Redstone had handed her over to the care of his mother, but by that time he had become hopelessly enslaved.

In the days and weeks that followed he had calmly and seriously reviewed the situation. He had been anxious to make no mistake. He was mistrustful of sudden impulses. By nature he was cautious.

There was no turning back, however. Each meeting deepened and intensified his love. She seemed to him all that his fancy painted, all that his heart could desire.

After that never-to-be-forgotten day at Tintagel he determined to ask her to be his wife. He was not in the least afraid of making a mistake. She was the only woman in the world for him. That she might refuse him scarcely occurred to him. He felt certain that she returned his love. He had seen it in the clear depths of her liquid eyes, heard it in the tones of her voice, felt it in the warm pressure of her hand. As they had wandered together on the cliffs or sat listening to the music of the sea their hearts had gone out to each other in silent assurance. There seemed no need for speech. They understood each other.

Had it not been for pressure of work, followed by an unexpected call to London, he would have rushed off to Pendare on the following day, and had he done so he would have got the answer he desired.

What, then, had happened in the interim ? What mysterious influence had been at work between their parting at Tintagel and their meeting again on the lawn at Pendare ?

He had been conscious of a change of atmosphere the moment she stood up to greet him. For the moment he

had assumed that it was maiden shyness. She knew why he had come.

Then fell the thunderbolt straight out of the blue. He had been too bewildered, too utterly stunned, to recall clearly what she had said. The blow had been so sudden and unexpected that his brain for a moment or two had refused to function. He supposed he had looked like a fool ; he knew he had felt like one.

In looking back he regretted that he had taken his dismissal so abjectly. He ought to have demanded an explanation. It was his right. He should have refused to leave until she had given him a reason for her conduct. She certainly had encouraged him, and equally certain he had not been precipitate.

Why, then—— ?

He was back again in the old tangle of questions, the old futile and vicious circle.

He had heard it said that no man ever yet understood a woman—not even his own wife. Perhaps it was true. Certainly he had never been faced before by so difficult a problem, and the worst of it was he was quite sure he would never have any peace of mind until he had solved it.

Yet he had no intention of seeking out Phyllis again. A woman may say “ No ” in such a way as to mean “ Yes.” If there had been any hesitancy in Phyllis’s reply, any lack of emphasis, any suggestion of doubt or uncertainty, he would have continued his quest. He was not the man to magnify difficulties or to quail before opposition. He was not lacking in courage. He could be as dogged as most people, but he was not the man to try to batter down a stone wall with his head.

Phyllis’s reply left him no room for hope. Her manner as well as her words denoted finality. He could

feel her anger and scorn as he retraced his steps across the lawn, and when he got into his little car and drove homeward he knew that his dream was at an end. Outwardly he appeared the same as ever, and no one suspected the tumult that raged within. Even his mother suspected nothing. If he spent more time than usual in his laboratory she thought nothing of it, or concluded that he was on the track of some fresh discovery.

In truth, however, he discovered nothing. For a time he lost all interest in his work. Life had become stale and flat. There seemed nothing worth striving for or fighting for.

Gradually, however, he pulled himself together. He could not afford to waste his life because a woman had scorned his love. Love might be the greatest thing in the world, but it was not the only thing. Duty would have to be henceforth his guiding star. He owed it to his age and generation to do his best—to track down disease whenever possible, to search for preventive measures, to devote his life to the service of humanity.

One morning at breakfast his mother rather startled him by remarking casually : “ I wonder when that pretty girl is going to call again. She promised, you know.”

“ Did she ? I don’t remember,” he remarked indifferently.

“ You are not interested in young women ? ” she questioned, with a smile.

“ Not particularly. Why should I be ? ”

“ Why shouldn’t you be ? I should like to see you happily married to some nice girl before I die. Do you know, I took a great fancy to that Miss Dean ? ”

“ Really, mother.”

“ She is so bright and cheerful. I hope she will call again soon.”

"I don't think that is at all likely."

"Why?"

"I see in the paper this morning that her uncle is dead."

"Dead? Oh, the poor child. What will become of her?"

"Haven't the remotest idea," he answered.

"And he was her only relative. Oh, I am sorry! I hope he has provided for her in his will. You think she has nothing of her own?"

"I don't remember saying so," he smiled. "I really know nothing of her affairs. She may be well off, or she may be as poor as a church mouse, but I should think it improbable that she will continue to live at Pendare."

"It will be awful for her if she has to go out into the world to earn her own living."

"Not more awful for her than for thousands of other girls."

"Oh yes, Basil. You could see in a moment that she had never been brought up to work."

"Perhaps she will get married," he smiled, and then the subject dropped.

Yet all that day and for many days after Phyllis was scarcely ever out of his thoughts. He loved her still in spite of her treatment of him—loved her more than he loved anything else on earth. Time might ease the ache in his heart, but he would never cease to love her.

CHAPTER XVIII

DREAMS AND VISIONS

SIR JOHN TRESIZE flattered himself that he had successfully spiked the guns of his one likely rival. Lucy the housemaid kept him informed of all that happened at Pendare. Through her he learned that Dr. Tresillian had called a second time; Lucy had seen him from an upstairs window. He had remained only a few minutes, however. He did not even take a seat, and when he walked away he never even looked behind him.

Tresize chuckled delightedly. The story Daniel had told her had evidently done its work. He need have no further fears in that direction.

He was still as determined as ever to marry her. Different men in the same circumstances act in totally different ways. Basil Tresillian, being a gentleman, accepted his dismissal as final. Phyllis had let him know definitely and emphatically that she did not want him, that she would not have him, and he had retired from the contest—there was nothing else that he could do. Tresize—not being a gentleman—resolved to win by foul means what he could not win by fair. His love was a compound of passion and cupidity. He wanted her fortune badly, and in his coarse and animal way he wanted her, and the fact that she had rejected him only made him the more determined.

Daniel's illness made him very angry. Daniel's death

was like a slap in the face. The lawyer had got the better of him, and he writhed at the thought. He hated being worsted by any man, but to be beaten by a man he had got securely under his thumb and who had proved a valuable tool was madness.

The arrival of Rachel Drew was another blow to him. He saw that he would need all his wits and all his cunning to accomplish his end. Fortunately, from his point of view, Lucy was likely to prove an exceedingly useful ally. Few things happened at Pendare of which he was not made aware.

There was one point of danger, however, which he did not suspect ; neither did Lucy. During Daniel's illness Mr. Weekes had been a frequent visitor. He came ostensibly to see the invalid or to inquire after his health. Strictly speaking, Pendare was outside the curate's pastoral area. His mission church was situated on the other side of St. Runton and his pastoral work lay among the poor people of the parish. The vicar shepherded the rich and well-to-do, though that did not mean that Mr. Weekes was excluded from their homes. The whole parish was open to him. He was free to go where he felt that duty called, and during Daniel's long illness he felt that duty called him to Pendare.

It may be that inclination played its part. Pendare was a pleasant house to visit. Its surroundings were restful to the eyes and soothing to the nerves. First and foremost, of course, his mission was spiritual. He came to give ghostly counsel and comfort to a sick man, but that did not prevent him from enjoying the hospitality and the company of the sick man's niece.

Phyllis always gave him a hearty welcome, and invariably provided him with a cup of tea. She could not do less than that. It was a long walk from his

lodgings to Pendare, and he often looked tired and in need of refreshment.

Moreover, she rather liked the curate. He was frank and natural and unaffected. He wasn't in the least "churchy" or superior. She stood a little in awe of the vicar, who never seemed to get outside his clericalism. Mr. Weekes, on the contrary, was a man and a neighbour first, and a cleric afterwards.

From the day when Phyllis had stopped her car by the roadside and taken him to his lodgings the curate had seen visions and dreamed dreams. He had known few of the pleasant things of life. His parents had been poor, and he had struggled through youth into manhood on very slender means. It was only by dint of much self-sacrifice that he had managed to get through a theological training college and secure ordination, since when he had toiled as a curate in the poorest parts of three parishes, and he saw very little hope of preferment. He had no wealthy or influential friends, no one to give him a push, no one to intercede for him in high places. As far as he could see, he might have to remain a curate to the end of his days. It was not exactly an inviting prospect, for he was human enough to long sometimes for pleasant places and green pastures. Pendare always made him feel how much there was of beauty and comfort, to say nothing of luxury, that lay entirely beyond his reach.

He was not envious of the rich—at least, he did not think he was—but he did sometimes feel that the good things of the world—and even of the Church—might with advantage be a little more evenly distributed. The vicar, for instance, lived in a big house surrounded by pleasant grounds. He kept a gardener, and a boy to clean the knives and boots, in addition to three maid-

servants indoors. It was true the vicar was rich apart from his stipend, while it was said that Mrs. Deersly had an independent income of her own ; but that somehow seemed only to accentuate the contrast between the comfort and luxury of the vicarage and the meanness of his own poor lodgings and his perpetual struggle to make both ends meet.

He had almost given up hope of ever being able to marry and have a real home of his own. He would like to marry. He had seen one or two girls with whom he believed he could be happy, but they were as poor as himself. Unless he could marry a girl who had money of her own, matrimony was out of the question.

And then the thought of Phyllis flashed across his brain. She had picked him up in the hot and dusty road and brought him home. She had been kind to him, had treated him as an equal, had invited him to Pendare if he should happen to be on that side of the parish and in need of a cup of tea.

Since then he had been often on that side of the parish and often in need of a cup of tea. Then her uncle had fallen ill and he had felt it his duty to call, and to call frequently. Phyllis had proved herself a charming hostess. Her welcome had always been sincere and unaffected. Also she was pretty—and rich. What more natural, therefore, that he should see visions and dream dreams ?

Preferment in the Church did not always go by merit. A man, for instance, who could entertain the Bishop or the Dean, who was independent of tithes or pew rents, who could send a contribution now and then to particular funds, stood a much better chance of getting on than a poor curate who lived in mean lodgings and hadn't a penny with which to bless himself.

David Weekes had never a thought of idleness or sloth. He wanted a larger life, a wider sphere, a chance of exerting a greater influence. If he had millions he would still want to preach, still be eager to minister to the sick and poor.

His manifest sincerity was what commended him to Phyllis more than anything else. He was not clever or even well read. He knew nothing of the trend of modern thought, and, what was more to the point, he did not want to know. He would never dream of exercising his own judgment on any question of doctrine or dogma. He accepted the formularies of his Church in their entirety. No doubt or misgiving ever troubled his mind. He preached what he believed and believed what he preached. His sermons had not only the ring of sincerity, but the ring of certitude. Hence many people preferred his preaching to that of the vicar. They might not always agree with him, nevertheless it was pleasant to listen to a man who was so absolutely certain of himself and of his message.

Had not Phyllis's mind been so full of other things, she might have suspected long before she did what the curate was after. While her uncle was alive the curate's visits were the most natural thing in the world; but when after the funeral he still continued to call, and to call with considerable frequency, she began to wonder why.

At first she half suspected that Rachel might be the attraction, but Rachel soon opened her eyes to the absurdity of that supposition.

"My dear Phyllis," Rachel said one afternoon, looking up from her sewing, "do you intend to marry Mr. Weekes?"

"Marry Mr. Weekes? Good gracious no," was the

astonished answer. "I don't intend to marry anyone—ever."

"Cut out the last word, old thing," Rachel laughed. "Of course you will marry some day."

"Why should I?"

"Well, you can't live in a big house like this, with women only, all the days of your life."

"I see no reason why I shouldn't," Phyllis answered slowly.

"Oh yes, dear, I think you do," and Rachel picked up her work again. "As Betty would say: 'It's agin' nature.'"

Phyllis burst into a ripple of laughter. "Really, Rachel, I thought you were modern and up-to-date, and believed in women's freedom and independence and all that."

"Well"—and Rachel appeared to examine her work critically, turning her head to one side and then the other—"I do still—in a way. Of course, as girls we used to talk a lot of nonsense. When one has to fight the world alone . . ."

"But I haven't to fight the world," Phyllis interrupted. "Fortunately I'm well provided for."

"That makes a difference, of course," Rachel went on. "But old maids are pathetic things, don't you think?—however rich they may be."

"Not always."

"Oh yes, they are. I lived with one for nearly a year. She had heaps of money, but that couldn't make up. Her life was frightfully empty, and she was lonely too . . . I couldn't help seeing it and I was sorry for her. She'd missed something——"

"But all women can't have husbands."

"No, I suppose not. That's the tragedy of it. I'm quite sure that married women have the best of it."

Husbands may be trying things. . . . I've not the least doubt they are, and wives have a lot to put up with. Still . . . well . . . I've come to the conclusion, dear, that any woman who has a decent husband has a lot to be thankful for. A man in the house makes a lot of difference——"

Phyllis thought of her uncle and was silent. He had been only a broken reed at best, but she missed him terribly.

"To look forward during the day to a man's home-coming in the evening," Rachel continued, "to plan and contrive for him, to consider his foibles, to mend his socks and warm his slippers . . . Oh, well, it gives a woman something to think of; makes life more interesting, more complete——"

"Since when, dear, have you turned philosopher?" Phyllis laughed.

Rachel did not reply for some time. She went on with her sewing, with puckered forehead as if thinking hard. Presently she said: "Living with poor old Miss Dacre opened my eyes to a lot of things. Before that I was in a big hostel with a lot of bachelor girls for nearly three months. Oh, we talked a lot about having a good time, and being independent, and living our own life, and all that. There wasn't much to it really. We all felt that. It was sort of whistling to keep our courage up. Oh yes, we can most of us stand alone on a pinch. Lots of women have to, but it isn't the same as having a man-prop to lean against. I don't think it is happiness that matters so much as completeness. You and I, Phyl, are incomplete and shall remain so until we get a man each to look after us."

"Oh, you renegade!" and Phyllis laughed again.

"No, dear; it is only that I'm beginning to learn

sense. If any decent man offers me marriage, I shall think twice before I reject him."

"But suppose you don't love him?"

"I confess I don't know anything about love," Rachel admitted. "I've read a lot about it, of course, but I'm a bit sceptical. I think the poets and novelists write a lot of tosh. If you respect a man, if he's decent and honest——"

"No, dear. That isn't enough. I'm sure it isn't," Phyllis protested. "Love is the essential thing. If you don't love a man supremely—overwhelmingly—love him better than everything else on earth—then—then——"

"But suppose you do love a man like that and he doesn't want you. Suppose he is in love with somebody else. And then some other decent man comes along—someone you can respect and admire! . . . And after all what is this love that people talk so much about? What do you and I know about it?"..

"Look here, old girl," Phyllis laughed. "You are talking, as they say, through your hat. Some day I shall see you with your soul in your eyes gazing at some man as if he were a demi-god."

"Oh, heavens, wouldn't it be a lark?" And Rachel laid down her work and stared out of the window as if trying to conjure up the vision Phyllis had suggested.

"Not a bit of use, old thing," she said at length. "Demi-gods don't come my way. But to get back to the curate. What do you intend to do with him?"

"Nothing."

"Then you'll have to head him off somehow. If he hangs round here much longer people will begin to talk. I'm sure he's neglecting his pastoral duties, and it's all on your account."

"How do you know that you are not the attraction?"

"How do I know? My dear, I've got eyes in my head. He never sees me when you are about. Oh, bless your innocent heart, I believe I'm a hundred years older than you. I've seen it for weeks and weeks. Doesn't being a parson's wife appeal to you?"

"Not a bit."

"Hard-hearted creature. . . . I should have thought it would be just your line. . . . Think what a field it would open up for your philanthropy. . . . You might help him to enlarge his church. And you could play the harmonium, and run another mothers' meeting, and establish another welfare centre, and be a second Miss Deersly, and——"

"Oh, do be quiet," Phyllis laughed.

"Pure altruism on my part, as you can see," Rachel went on. "For if you became Mrs. Weekes, what would become of me?"

"If you don't repent I don't know what will become of you," Phyllis laughed.

Then suddenly the door-bell rang and a moment or two later Mr. Weekes was announced.

Rachel almost exploded, and went and mended the fire so that the curate might not see her face. She took a long time over it, her shoulders heaving all the while.

Phyllis stood up a little prim and stiff and held out her hand. She felt almost annoyed at his calling just then. Had he been sensitive to atmosphere he would have felt her coldness. Not being sensitive, he was not conscious of any lowering of the temperature.

Rachel came forward at length and shook hands with him, and then Phyllis escaped from the room on the plea of ordering tea.

CHAPTER XIX

MISSING

PHYLLIS had been quite unsuspecting until Rachel opened her eyes. Her mind had been so full of other things—her troubles and losses and heartache—that she was less observant than usual. She fretted a good deal over the loss of her uncle. Bitterly as she felt sometimes his betrayal of the trust that had been reposed in him, she could not help missing him. In a hundred ways she had unconsciously leaned on him. He had been for so many years the head of the little household. She had looked up to him, confided in him, sought his counsel, trusted to his judgment. Hence his death created a gap that no one else could fill. The house seemed empty and silent. She grew nervous, especially at night. Unexpected noises startled her. She slept less soundly, and often awoke in the morning languid and unrefreshed.

But much as she felt the loss of her uncle, she felt far more the loss of Basil Tresillian. It was a loss she could share with no one else—not even with Rachel. It was a grief she had to hide deep in her own heart, and the constant effort to appear cheerful tried her strength more than she knew. She had come so near winning the greatest thing in life. The love she had longed for more than for anything else on earth had been offered to her, and she had spurned it because of a lie. She could not conceive of anything more utterly cruel and shameful.

It was so unfair, so unjust, that it sometimes threatened to destroy her faith in the moral order of the universe. She could understand people suffering for their own sin—paying the penalty of their own lies ; but that she who had wronged no one, who had done her best to walk the narrow way of truth and honour, should be compelled to suffer for the falsehood and treachery of others seemed contrary to all her conceptions of right and justice.

To make her position all the worse, she was unable to explain. She wondered constantly what Basil Tresillian thought of her. How ungrateful and unjust she must appear in his eyes ! And he had been so good to her—so generous and chivalrous—and she had rewarded him with scorn and contempt. She wondered if any other girl had ever been placed in such a cruel position.

Night and day she searched her mind for some way out of the difficulty. Her sense of justice and fair play told her that he ought to know the truth, but who was to tell him ? Could she go herself and tell him the whole sorry story and throw herself on his pity and compassion ?

Sometimes she felt strongly tempted to do so ; but modern as she believed herself to be, when it came to the crucial point her courage always failed her. A man might do such a thing, but not a girl : convention backed by a very natural shyness held her back. She could suffer, but she could not trample upon her maiden pride.

So her mind remained in a turmoil and her heart ached unceasingly. It was not surprising, therefore, that she attached no significance to the comings and goings of Mr. Weekes. She thought no more of his visits than she did of the visits of Peter Ruddock.

She had made Peter her overseer and steward in place of her uncle, and Peter was attending to his duties with a care and conscientiousness that Daniel never displayed. Daniel never consulted Phyllis if he could avoid it, frequently to her great annoyance. He liked to give the tenants the impression that, though the estate legally belonged to Phyllis, he was in reality lord of the manor, and that his will was law.

Peter made no mistakes of that kind. He was under no illusions as to what Phyllis desired. She was no mere figurehead. She insisted on hearing all complaints, on being informed of all dilapidations, and on discussing all questions of repair. She would have no rents raised or leases terminated until she had been put in possession of all the facts. She would have no rack-renting, and if harvests failed she was prepared to bear her full share of the loss. To have a happy and contented people about her was far more to her than to have a big balance at the bank.

The Colonel had said something to her one day about "the path of the just." She did not quite understand the allusion, but at any rate that was the path she intended to pursue. It might not be an easy path or a profitable one ; yet she was quite sure that doing the right thing would always be best in the end.

So Peter came to see her at least one evening a week to talk matters over. Peter had also succeeded Daniel as solicitor in the town. He had his own nameplate on the door in addition to Daniel's, which was allowed to remain, and Phyllis took a very genuine interest in his success.

He was not a brilliant young man, but he was safe and painstaking and conscientious ; and as he had lived in St. Runton all his life and was universally respected,

the bulk of Daniel's clientèle remained with him and fresh clients came in from time to time.

Between Peter's visits, therefore, and the curate's there was a wide difference. Phyllis saw it in a moment when Rachel pointed it out. Why should he continue to call at Pendare when there was no sick to be visited? Why should he so often find himself on that side of the parish? Why did he linger so long over his tea? Why was he always so reluctant to leave? Why had he got into the habit of introducing the personal element into his conversation? These and a dozen other things—trifling in themselves—became obtrusively significant.

Phyllis was both flattered and annoyed. Mr. Weekes was a clergyman and was therefore not to be lightly esteemed. On the other hand, she had given all her heart and all her love to Basil Tresillian and wanted the admiration of no other man.

Autumn had come and October went out in rain and tempest. The angry wind tore the leaves from the trees and sent them flying in all directions. Day after day the rain came down in sheets and low-hung clouds shut out the distant hills, the level lawns swam with water and the rose-garden became a scene of desolation, the leat roared and gurgled in the glen and deep pools lay across the roads, and still in spite of the weather Mr. Weekes found his way to Pendare.

Phyllis felt helpless, but managed with the aid of Rachel never to be alone with him. She did not want to hurt his feelings. She liked him as a man and a friend, and had not Basil Tresillian crossed her path and stolen her heart she might have welcomed his visits.

She might. She did not know. Rachel's irresponsible chatter had left its impress on her mind. She had to admit that a man in the house in some indefinable

way produced a feeling of strength and security. She had realised that more and more since the death of her uncle. Also she was conscious of an inward revolt against the idea of living alone in a big house to the end of the chapter. If it was not good for man to be alone, it was even more true that it was not good for a woman. Rachel had said that they were both incomplete, and she was inclined to think that Rachel was right.

Life was very perplexing and love had increased the perplexity. If only Basil would come to her again and ask for an explanation! But of course he would not come. She had reared an impassable barrier between them. She would have to go alone down the vale of years bearing a life-long burden of sorrow and regret.

Go alone unless——

She put the thought aside again and again, but it always came back like a swallow to its nest.

Mr. Weekes was a good man, an honest man, devoted to his work, and as far as one could judge absolutely sincere. To be the wife of a clergyman offered endless opportunities for usefulness, for good works and charity.

To be Mr. Weekes's wife—his *wife*?

No, no. It was impossible. She loved Basil Tresillian. How, then, could she be the wife of another?

But the seed that had been sown in her mind was not dead. It sprouted again. Also Mr. Weekes by his visits thrust himself into the foreground. Unconsciously she took more notice of him. She studied him across the tea-table. She ceased to think of him as a curate and regarded him as a man.

She had no fault to find with him—at least, not very much fault. He could not compare, of course, with Basil. He was not handsome nor particularly clever.

He was a little lacking also in refinement, but in essentials . . .

She dismissed him again from her mind. It was foolish of her to think of him at all. Yet on the following day she found her thoughts circling round the same subject. Rachel had said that she would think twice before refusing any decent man who offered her marriage : but then Rachel was not in love—had never been in love—did not know what love meant. She (Phyllis) knew. Her heart was crying out for Basil all the time.

So matters went on for another fortnight and then something happened. The storm had blown itself out and was followed by what the meteorologists called an anti-cyclone. The air became stagnant, a heavy mist lay on the woods and fields, the distant hills were blotted out, the bare trees loomed up with ghostly indistinctness, the few brown leaves that remained on their branches hung motionless, or dropped slowly and silently to the ground. Down at Portheven the sea lay like a pool and broke with scarcely a sound along the shore. For two or three evenings, just as it was growing dark, a small yacht had nosed its way in between the cliffs and dropped anchor scarcely more than a stone's-throw away from the little breakwater, but when daylight came it had vanished again beyond the cliffs. Very few people noticed it, and then gave it only a passing thought.

Rachel rejoiced in the calmer weather. She did not like the wind. The roaring in the trees kept her awake at night. Phyllis, on the contrary, disliked the stillness. The sound of the wind was like a friendly voice ; the silence seemed mysterious and menacing. She became nervous and apprehensive, and for no reason that she could explain.

One evening she and Rachel sat together in the

drawing-room. The curtains were closely drawn and a cheerful fire crackled in the grate. Rachel was absorbed in a novel; Phyllis was busy with needlework; for a long time not a word was spoken. Then a faint knock fell on the door, which a moment later was pushed open and Lucy advanced toward her mistress.

"Please, miss," she said, "there's a little girl at the side-door as wants you badly for something. She seems in terrible trouble and is a sobbing fit to break 'er heart."

Phyllis's sympathies were roused in an instant. "A little girl crying at the side-door?" she questioned; "and on such a dark night!"

Lucy nodded and backed out of the room.

Phyllis laid down her work and followed. She closed the drawing-room door behind her, passed through the hall and disappeared at the back of the stairs.

Turk looked up from his basket and sniffed. Phyllis pulled open the side-door, and seeing no one stepped out into the still night.

"Little girl," she called softly, "where are you?" The next moment a thick scarf was wound tightly over her mouth, her arms were pinioned behind her, and two men lifted her from the ground and bore her swiftly and silently toward the stables, where they thrust her unceremoniously into a motor-car. One of the men got into the car with her, the other jumped into the driver's seat, and in a few moments the car and its occupants had vanished in the darkness. On reaching the main road the driver quickened his pace and headed for Portheven.

Rachel came slowly to the consciousness that she was occupying the drawing-room alone. She laid down her book and reflected for a moment. Of course, she remembered now that Lucy had come into the room and

whispered something to her mistress, and that Phyllis had laid her work on the chair and followed her.

How long was that ago? She could not remember. She had been so absorbed in her book that she had lost count of time. Of course, Phyllis would be back again directly.

She picked up her book again and read another page, then dropped it a second time. The house seemed strangely still. It was not like Phyllis to leave her alone in this way without a word. How long had she been away? Rachel had an uneasy feeling that she had been absent from the room quite a long time.

She got up at length and went out into the hall, and the first thing she noticed was that Turk's basket was empty. Now, what was the meaning of that? Surely she had not gone for a walk on such a night and taken Turk with her? She dismissed the idea at once. Phyllis would never do anything so foolish.

She ran lightly upstairs and knocked at the door of Phyllis's work-room. Getting no answer, she pushed open the door and found the room empty. She hesitated for a moment, then approached Phyllis's bedroom. The door was ajar, so she pushed it open and went in.

"Phyl dear," she called, but no one answered. Then she switched on the light and stared about the room. Phyllis was not there.

"Now, where can she have hidden herself?" Rachel reflected, as she hurried down the stairs. She looked into the dining-room, then into the library, but both rooms were in darkness.

"Curious," she reflected. "Phyllis is not in the habit of absenting herself in this way."

Pushing open a baize door she went down a short passage and turned into the servants' hall. Betty was

seated in an easy-chair reading a newspaper, 'Lijah was smoking on the other side the fireplace.

"Oh, Betty," she said, a note of alarm creeping into her voice; "have you seen Phyllis?"

"Seen her, my dear? Ain't she in the drawin'-room with you?"

"She was; but she left it quite a long time ago and I've been searching for her everywhere."

"Left it? What for?" and Betty heaved herself out of her chair and stood up.

"Lucy came and spoke to her about something and she got up at once and left the room. I was deep in a book at the time and took no notice, but I feel sure it was quite a long time ago."

Without further words Betty waddled off into the kitchen. Cook was dozing in a rocking-chair by the fire; Lucy was not visible.

"Cook, where's Lucy?" Betty called sharply.

"She said as 'ow she was goin' upstairs to turn down the beds," was the slow reply.

Instantly Betty went to the foot of the stairs and shouted at the top of her voice: "Lucy, Lucy, be you there?"

"Of course I be, ma'am. Was you a-callin'?"

"What else do 'ee think I'm doing? 'Ave you seen Miss Phyllis lately?"

"Not since I spoke to 'er in the drawin'-room, ma'am."

"What did you want wi' her?"

"A little girl was at the side-door, ma'am, sobbin' terrible, and wanted to speak to 'er."

"And did she go?"

"I s'pose so. I had my work to do upstairs and didn't wait to see."

Rachel and Betty went together to the side-door—which stood half open—and looked out into the night.

Not a sound broke the stillness and nothing could be seen fifty yards away.

Betty stepped out into the darkness and called again and again: "Miss Phyllis! Miss Phyllis!" but no answering voice came out of the night.

Then 'Lijah joined them, and they went round to the front of the house and searched the whole length of the terrace, and called again and again; but the mist lay heavy on the lawns and garden and their voices carried but a little way.

Presently Betty said with a gasp: "I believe the tender dear 'as been sperited away, and if she has I know who's done it."

"Oh, but that is impossible," Rachel replied. "People are not spirited away in these days."

"You don't know everything, my dear, nor who's who," Betty retorted. "'Lijah, why don't 'ee do something?"

"That's what I'm axing myself, Betty," he answered slowly. "I'm wantin' to do something; but what can I do?"

"The Lord only knows," Betty replied, and burst into tears.

Rachel rushed off into the house moved by a sudden inspiration. Going to the telephone she rang up Peter Ruddock. Peter was the only man she knew and she felt that a man was needed.

"If I were only a man," she reflected. "We women seem so helpless in an emergency."

"Hallo," came a voice over the wire.

"Is that you, Peter?"

"I'm Peter Ruddock."

"And I'm Rachel Drew. Oh, Peter—I mean Mr. Ruddock—Miss Phyllis has disappeared—vanished.

She went to the side-door to speak to someone, and no one here has seen her since. Will you go to the police station? Get people together with lanterns to search the woods? Do everything you can think of. I'm nearly off my head."

"Where's Turk?" came the sudden question.

"He's disappeared also."

"That's better. Don't lose heart. I'll do what I can. Will see you later," and the bell clicked.

Then Rachel sat down, and woman-like gave way to tears.

CHAPTER XX

ON BOARD THE "LAPWING"

SIR JOHN TRESIZE tramped round and round the deck of his little yacht with obvious impatience. Every now and then he paused and strained his eyes through the gloom toward the end of the Porth, then with a muttered imprecation would begin his tramp again.

This was the third evening he had waited, and so far in vain. He could not understand it. He had made all his preparations with great care and provided against nearly every contingency. Moreover, all the conditions were favourable, the weather was mild, the nights misty and dark, his men pledged to obey him to the letter. What could have happened?

He was afraid that Lucy had proved the weak link in the chain, and yet hers was the easiest part. Surely on some excuse or other she could have tempted her mistress to leave the house for a few seconds after dark—a hundred opportunities would present themselves to anyone with brains. Had she shown her hand and bungled the whole thing? He wouldn't have had any woman in the business if he could have avoided it. Taking them in the mass they had neither sense nor judgment. Women of the Lucy type were especially brainless: but what could he do? If he was to carry out his plans he was bound to have an ally inside the house, and Lucy was the only one that could be bribed. It would be maddening if he had to wait another night with his hopes unrealised.

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From out the great stillness came a puff of wind that struck his face for a moment and was gone. He disliked these sudden puffs of wind, and they were becoming more frequent. He feared that out at sea somewhere a storm was raging. The glass was still high, but it had begun to run down rather rapidly. If he failed in his enterprise to-night he might have to wait weeks, perhaps months. Porthaven was no place for the *Lapwing* in stormy weather.

To pass the time away he began to review his position and the steps he had taken for the accomplishment of his purpose. He admitted that his methods were primitive, but from his point of view they were quite honourable. He intended to marry Phyllis without a moment's unnecessary delay. He wouldn't be the first Tresize by any means who had run away with his bride and married her against her will. The Tresizes were like that. His great-grandfather had kidnapped his wife while returning from church one Sunday evening, and had galloped forty miles with her across country and had married her the very next day, and by all accounts they had lived very happily together.

All was fair in love and war, and if a man could not get the woman he wanted by persuasion, then he would have to get her by force. There was nothing else for it. Moreover, it was the great law of life—so he believed—the strong took what they wanted by the strength of their own arms.

He would not admit for a moment that there was anything dishonourable in it. He had got a special marriage licence in his pocket. As soon as Phyllis was safely on board they would make for the Scilly Islands. At St. Mary's they could get married. No clergyman would refuse to perform the ceremony when he saw the bishop's

licence. That Phyllis would raise any objection was unthinkable—she would be too concerned for her reputation.

As soon as the ceremony was over he would have the news sent across to the mainland and get the announcement into the local Press. He had already decided on the form of it.

“By Special Licence, On November th, at St. Mary’s, Scilly Islands, by the Rev. ———, Phyllis, only daughter of the late Robert Dean, of Pendare, to Sir John Tresize, of Polgrain.”

It would create a bit of a sensation, of course, but what of that? Nobody would think any the worse of him, or of Phyllis, either. The men would laugh and drink to their healths, and the women would giggle and say, “just like a Tresize. What determined men they have always been.” Women always admired strong men. They had no use for weak, sentimental creatures who were afraid to do with their hands what they had planned with their heads.

After a week had passed he would get another item of news in the local Press :

“Sir John and Lady Tresize will spend the second part of their honeymoon in France. They hope to return to Polgrain in good time for the Christmas festivities.”

By the time they got home everybody would be ready to receive them, and Phyllis, he had no doubt, would be as proud as Punch of her new dignities.

All the difficulties, of course, were at the start. Phyllis was not only strong-willed, but she had brains. She had outwitted him once, and there was a bare possibility she might do so again, especially if Lucy should play her hand

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badly. If only they could get her safely on board the *Lapwing* he would be all right, and there would be no further trouble. He did not believe that Phyllis disliked him. She simply fancied that she did not like him well enough to marry him, but when she saw that resistance was useless, she would—like any sensible woman—accept the inevitable.

That kidnapping in the eyes of the law was a serious offence he was well aware, but if he got safely away with Phyllis, what did that matter? Who was to invoke the law or set its machinery in operation? Not Phyllis, certainly, for she would be his wife, and nobody else would be likely to lay any charge against him. Hence, as far as the law was concerned, he was quite happy. He cared no more for the law than he cared for convention.

His only concern was lest through some bungling or stupidity on the part of his agents his strategy should fail.

Suddenly, away in the distance, he saw two tiny blobs of light, and his heart seemed to jump into his throat.

"At last!" he said to himself. He could have shouted, so great was his relief.

As he watched, the blobs grew brighter and more distinct. "They've got her," he chuckled. "That's my car, and it would not be on its way here unless they had her safe and sound. Hurrah!" and he reached out his hands unconsciously towards the approaching lights.

Nearer and nearer came the car, and at length he noticed that it had stopped. It was too misty for him to see anything that was happening. The two lights ran into one and then disappeared entirely. The car had evidently turned round and was now broadside on.

He could easily picture in his mind what was taking place. Nick Nankivel in the yacht's boat would be waiting just inside the little breakwater. It would not take

many minutes to get Phyllis out of the car and place her in the boat, and then Nick would pull straight for the *Lapwing*.

Two of his men were already at the winch ready to pull up the anchor.

A longer and a stronger puff of wind swept across his face, followed by a deep moaning sound that came in from the open sea.

He shivered a little in spite of himself. He did not like the feel of the weather. They would be starting none too soon, and it would not be easy steering on such a night. He hoped the wind would hold off until they reached the Scillies.

Suddenly a piercing and terrifying shriek rang out, that might be heard miles away on such a still night.

"The fools," he hissed, between his teeth, "they've let her get the gag out, or they've never properly gagged her. Oh, the blundering idiots—the blockheads——"

A second shriek followed the first ; then a third—blood-curdling and horrible.

Tresize turned pale and clenched his hands. "That's not a woman's voice," he muttered to himself. "Good heavens ! I wonder what's happened ?"

A moment or two later a light flashed, followed by a murmur of voices. Then came the sound of running feet and the twinkle of other lights. Then everything grew silent. He strained his ears and listened intently, but no sound broke the stillness except that strange low moan that floated in from the open sea.

After what seemed an interminable time the faint dip of paddles reached his ears, and straining his eyes through the darkness he espied at length the yacht's gig drawing steadily nearer. He left the wheel and ran to the side, where he leaned over the bulwarks and waited. Silently

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the boat came alongside, was made fast, and Nankivel clambered on deck.

"Well?" Tresize demanded in a voice of suppressed rage and anxiety.

"The game's up, sir," was the tense reply.

"How? Tell me at once."

"Better weigh anchor first, sir, and hook it."

"There's no chance?"

"Not the ghost of a chance. All Porthleven's there, and Buddle's been howling and shrieking like a mad-man."

Tresize gave orders for the anchor to be raised and the engine started; then led the way to the saloon, followed by Nankivel.

Pouring out a stiff glass of whisky for his mate and another for himself, he seated himself at the end of the table. "Now go ahead," he said angrily.

"I've precious little to tell," Nankivel replied. "I waited, of course, inside the breakwater, and was beginning to think the fools had failed again, when I saw the lights of the car along the road. So I got myself into position close up to the wharf, and stood up prepared to take the young lady in my arms."

"The car drew up all right, and just slewed round into a convenient position. I could not see anything very clearly, for you know what the night is, and the head-lamps didn't help anything. Buddle stopped the engine and got down, and I heard him pull open the door of the car. I showed my green light for a moment so that they could see exactly where I was."

"As far as I can make out—more by the sounds they made than anything else—they got the young lady out all right and were making for me, when something happened, but what, I no more know than you do."

"But what do you think had happened?" Tresize demanded, almost hissing out the words.

Nankivel took another drink and scratched his head. "You've a right to ask the question, of course," he admitted at length, "but the fact is I'm fair boggled. You see it was too dark to see anything clearly. I could just make out the outline of the car and the two men, Buddle and Johns. I expect the young lady would be in black, and for that reason I could see nothing of her. Then all of a sudden Buddle gives a shriek—I feel sure it was Buddle—and begins dancing and whirling about like a madman."

"I heard the shriek," Tresize said impatiently.

"I quite expected you would, sir. It was enough to wake the dead, and it was followed by a second and a third. After that he moaned and groaned as though he were being skinned alive. Well, that shriek brought all Portheven on the scene. A policeman came first and turned his bull's-eye on the car and then on something lying on the ground. I tried to catch what was being said, but by that time people were running and shouting in all directions, and Buddle's groans were so awful that they drowned everything else. But whatever had happened, I'm pretty certain it was something pretty scaring and dreadful."

"But can't you make any guess at all?" Tresize questioned anxiously.

"Well, sir, I've a kind of feeling—I may be altogether mistaken, of course—but I've a kind of feeling that when they hauled the young lady out of the car they found she was dead."

"Good heavens, no. Surely not that," Tresize gasped.

"I don't know, of course," Nankivel went on, "but something must have given 'em a pretty fright for a man to

yell like that. You see they may have gagged her so tight that they suffocated her, and if they had—well, it would be pretty dreadful when they came to haul her out. Some men would rather touch a snake than they would a dead body."

Tresize dropped his eyes to the table and was silent for a while. His face had grown grey and haggard. Possibilities loomed up before him more horrifying than anything he had ever imagined. Whether Nankivel was right or wrong in his surmise, his own position had become desperate. Two of his principal agents were in the hands of the police, and they would no doubt make a clean breast of it. The machinery of the law was already in motion. No time would be lost in issuing a warrant for his arrest. He might escape for a while, but could he escape ultimately? He would have to return sooner or later. What then? Would he be able to prove an alibi? Would he be able to convince a jury that he knew nothing of the affair—that it was a trumped-up charge on the part of Buddle and Johns, who owed him a grudge—he was actually in the Scilly Islands at the time?

He raised his eyes at length and looked at his mate. "Did anyone see you, Nick?" he questioned.

"Not a soul," was the reply. "In the shadow of the breakwater it was dark as Davy Jones's locker."

"But you showed a light."

"That was before the policeman arrived; and when the crowd came on the scene nobody looked in my direction. Everybody was too interested in what was happening on the wharf."

"And do you think you got away unobserved?"

"I'm sure of it. I glided out as silent as a ghost."

"Then it will be difficult to connect us with the affair."

"Buddle and Johns will split, of course!"

"But suppose Miss—suppose the young lady is dead."

Suppose the fools so bungled the affair that they killed her. It is they who will be charged with murder. Such a charge cannot be brought against me. I can prove I was not near the spot, that I knew nothing about it——”

“What about the accessory business?”

“That will have to be considered. I admit that I’m in a beast of a hole. I wonder if anybody has recognised the *Lapwing*?”

Nankivel did not reply for several moments. He appeared to be listening.

“Is that the wind?” he questioned at length. And he got up suddenly from his seat and went and looked at the barometer.

“Seems to me it’s time you and I were on deck,” he said, turning round. We are in for ugly weather or I’m very much mistaken.”

“I’ve been a bit afraid of it all evening,” Tresize remarked, with an anxious look in his eyes.

“Well, there’s nothing to worry about just yet,” Nankivel replied cheerfully. “Unless you intend putting back and facing it out.”

“No, no. Not that,” was the hurried answer. “I must have time to think about it. We’d better run for the Scillies as we had intended.”

“Not easy waters to navigate in a storm, sir,” Nankivel said thoughtfully.

“Perhaps not. But if the wind gets up the fog will disappear; you must not forget that.”

“I’m thinking that Mount’s Bay would be much easier made,” Nankivel replied slowly.

“Very likely: but I intend keeping off the mainland for a few days. We’ll get to know at St. Mary’s all that has happened, and all that is likely to happen. If I’ve got to stand a trial I shall have to decide on a line of defence.”

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"As you will," Nankivel replied, and led the way on deck. Sir John went aft to speak to the man at the wheel. The mate went forward and stood for some time scanning the heavens. The mist had entirely disappeared and here and there a star was visible, across the face of which huge masses of cloud were scudding at a rapid rate.

"I don't like it," the mate muttered to himself as the *Lapwing* rose and sank on the wide Atlantic swell. "This is what comes of playing the fool and running in face of the law. I wish I had never consented to take a hand in the business."

Turning round, he gave orders for everything to be made taut on deck and the saloon skylight to be protected by a tarpaulin.

A little later he sought out Tresize, whom he found busy poring over a chart. "Look here, sir," he said. "The weather looks mighty ugly. Don't you think we'd better change our course and run for St. Ives? We might make it before the storm breaks."

Sir John did not reply for several moments. He appeared to be thinking deeply; his eyes were troubled, his freckled face grey and drawn. Anger had given place to alarm, his schemes had gone awry, his sins were beginning to find him out.

Presently he looked up. "That would be playing into the hands of the police, Nick," he said, with a shake in his voice. "No, no. We shall be safe in the Scillies and nobody will be able to prove that we weren't there all the time."

"If we ever make them," Nick said dourly.

"Oh, we'll make them all right," he replied. "I know every yard of the coast and so do you. Meanwhile we'll drive the *Lapwing* for all she's worth," and putting aside the chart they went on deck together.

CHAPTER XXI

REACTION

THE honours of the evening belonged to Turk. When Phyllis passed through the hall on her way to the side-door he raised his head and watched her, and when, after waiting several minutes, she did not return, he uncurled himself and hopped out of his basket and followed her. Outside the door he raised his head and sniffed, then trotted away in the direction of the garage. Nothing was to be seen, however. The car in which Phyllis was a prisoner was nearing the end of the drive. Turk raised his head and pricked up his ears, then dashed forward like a stone out of a catapult.

It would be interesting to get inside a dog's mind, to follow the working of a dog's brain. Did the "poor 'eathen beast," as Betty had dubbed him, reason the matter out, or did he follow a blind instinct? His quick ears no doubt had caught the sound of wheels on the gravel and the puff, puff of the exhaust, but why did he assume that his mistress was in the car or guess that she might need his help? When he retired to his basket he was expected to remain there for the night. It was no part of his duty to be out in the dark alone. Perhaps he reasoned that it was his business to keep as close as possible to his mistress wherever she might be.

Anyhow, he followed the car guided by the sound of the wheels. If he discovered at the end of the journey that his mistress was not in it he could return again, and no

harm would be done. If, on the other hand, she was in the car—well, he would want to know the reason why. Also he would let her understand that he was not going to leave her under any circumstances, neither would he consent to be left.

It was a tremendous race for him. The car put on speed directly it reached the main road. It twisted and turned a good many times before it reached the Even Valley, and then, the way being straight, it left him far in the rear.

Buddle had just succeeded in hauling Phyllis out of the car when Turk arrived on the scene. Seeing his mistress bound and helpless in the arms of a strange man, he concluded that it was time for him to act, and without a moment's delay sprang at Buddle's throat. It was a good aim on the whole, but a little high ; his upper teeth crunched through Buddle's chin, his lower fangs hooked behind his jaw. It was quite sufficient, however, for Turk's purpose, and he made no effort to change his grip.

Buddle, believing for the moment that the devil had got him, dropped his burden and gave a yell that was heard in every house in the village.

Turk silently tightened his jaws, and Buddle yelled again and again, and tried to fight off the terrible thing that by sheer weight was dragging him to the ground. Johns, after a few moments' hesitation, went cautiously to the rescue of his comrade. Getting hold of Turk by the hind legs he tried to drag him away, which only made matters worse, from Buddle's point of view.

A few moments later, P.C. Blewitt arrived on the scene, and turned his flashlight first on the car—which he saw was empty—then on Phyllis, who was lying on the ground.

Blewitt scented crime in a moment, and his usually sluggish brain became alert. "A murder case, no doubt,"

he reflected, "and the murderers intended to dispose of the body of their victim by dropping it into the sea—but something has prevented them. What?"

Leaving Phyllis, he turned his attention to the men. A twist of his bull's-eye revealed at once the true state of affairs. One of the men was clearly safe enough for the moment, so he proceeded to handcuff the other, which he succeeded in doing in an incredibly short space of time. Then he turned back again to the victim. He would have to make sure as a necessary preliminary that she was quite dead. By this time half the population of Portheven was on the spot. Phyllis tried to raise her head and looked wildly about her. Blewitt felt a sudden twinge of disappointment. It was not a murder case after all. Like many another man he thirsted for notoriety.

In a moment Phyllis was surrounded by a dozen people, the gag was removed, her hands and feet freed, and she was raised to a sitting position.

During all this time Buddle kept groaning and howling like a man demented.

"I've got to explain, ma'am," Blewitt said, addressing Phyllis, "that a dawg has got the man by the jaw and won't let him go. Perhaps the dawg is yours. If so you might call him off."

"Oh, I wonder," she said, as well as her painful mouth would let her. Then raising her voice slightly, she said, "Turk, dear, are you there?"

Instantly Turk relinquished his victim and came and sat by her side. He did not attempt to lick her hand—perhaps he realised that his mouth was half full of blood—but he looked at her longingly out of his big mournful eyes.

After that explanations followed swiftly. Phyllis told her story in as few words as possible. Johns, finding

himself handcuffed, made a clean breast of it—he was too frightened to attempt equivocation. Buddle said nothing. He was in no condition for speechmaking, but his groans won some sympathy from the onlookers.

In the end he and Buddle were marched off to the police-station. The case was unique in the experience of Blewitt, but he felt that he would be perfectly justified in keeping them under lock and key until he had consulted his superiors.

Phyllis was taken back to Pendare in the car in which she had come. A local chauffeur offered to drive, and Blewitt, after seeing his prisoners safely housed, seated himself by his side. He would have preferred an inside seat, but the presence of Turk made him cautious. Turk had evidently a strong objection to any stranger coming near his mistress.

In passing through the gateway into the drive Phyllis was surprised at seeing tiny points of light moving about in all directions—on the lawns, in the plantation, and even in the fields beyond. She knew nothing, of course, of Rachel's frantic appeal to Peter Ruddock over the telephone. Peter had responded with almost breathless alacrity, with the result that a dozen men, including two policemen, were searching with lanterns in every likely and unlikely spot for the missing lady.

Betty was too overwhelmed to do anything. She sat out on the front doorstep rocking herself to and fro and wailing like an Irish banshee. She saw lights and heard voices all about her, but she had no faith in the efforts of the searchers.

'Lijah, with a lantern, was out with the others.

"You can go, if you like," she said to him, her face quivering with emotion, "but it waan't be any sort of use. That villain, Sir John, is at the bottom of it. I've al'ays

been feared of 'im. If anybody finds the dear cheeld it'll be that poor 'eathen beast Turk. I'd rather trust that onlovely critter than all the p'leecemen in St. Runton."

When at length the car drove up and Blewitt got down from his seat and pulled open the door, Betty sat and stared like one in a trance. Her first thought was that her darling's dead body was being brought home. She could not have moved to save her life.

When, however, Turk jumped out and began scampering about on the gravel, Betty, with a yell of delight, sprang to her feet, and almost before Phyllis was out of the car the old woman had her arms about her and was hugging her with a passion of love and tenderness that no words could express.

There was no need for words, however. Each knew the other, and each understood what the other felt. Silently they hobbled into the house, for Phyllis's ankles were still stiff and painful. Turning into the drawing-room, she dropped into an easy-chair and sighed.

Betty ran back to the door and shrilled with an amazing strength of lung: "'Lijah! 'Lijah! 'Lijah!"

"Yes, Betty," he called. He had heard the car drive up and was running towards the house as fast as his old legs would carry him to know what it meant.

"The tender dear's got 'ome safe and sound." Then her voice broke and she could say no more.

"The Lord be praised," 'Lijah ejaculated fervently, then turned round and began to yell the news to everyone who was within hailing distance.

Ten minutes later the drawing-room was half full of excited people. Phyllis sat up in her chair alert and apparently cheerful. Her cheeks were slightly flushed and her eyes sparkled. Except that her tongue was swollen and her wrists and ankles were sore and stiff she

felt none the worse. She was not conscious yet of the shock she had received. It was sufficient for the moment that she was safe home again with friendly faces all about her.

Turk sat up close to her feet and regarded the scene with big, solemn eyes. What he thought of it all no one knows. If he understood half the things that were said he must have felt a proud dog.

The one thing that worried Phyllis was the publicity that would be given to the affair. There was no help for it, however. It would be impossible to keep tongues from wagging. Impossible to keep it out of the local Press. She might even be called upon to give evidence in a court of law.

As it happened, however, when on the following day St. Runton fairly hummed with excitement, she felt too utterly spent and exhausted to care about anything. Whether she lived or died was to her a matter of utter indifference. The reaction had set in with alarming intensity. Her health had been below par for weeks past. The shock of her abduction put the finishing touch on it.

Dr. Blake, who was called in next day, looked grave and insisted on very careful nursing.

"It is not a case for drugs," he told Rachel. "They are only palliatives at best. Organically she is perfectly sound, but her nerves are all on edge. She has received a severe shock—a very severe shock, and she will need time to recover. At present she is slightly hysterical."

"She has been all the morning," Rachel replied.

"Just so. Of course, that is not to be wondered at. It was a frightful experience for her—a very frightful experience. The perpetrators of such an outrage deserve to be—— Well, I will not say what I think they deserve——"

"They deserve to be shot," Rachel ejaculated.

"Well, at any rate, I hope the law will deal with them severely. Fancy in these days! Dear me, what is the world coming to?"

"I'd like to see the man who is at the bottom of it strung up," Rachel replied, with emphasis. "Such a man is worse than a pestilence. A pestilence only destroys people's bodies: that man is out to destroy people's souls."

"H'm, yes," and the doctor fingered his chin meditatively. "Do you think Miss Dean has been fretting lately?"

"I think she has felt the loss of her uncle a good deal. In fact, I'm sure she has."

"Nothing else, you think? No worries of any kind?"

"Not that I am aware of. She is not quite so bright as when we were at school together. Neither am I, for that matter. Time sobers most of us," and Rachel smiled crookedly.

"Well, keep her as cheerful as possible. Divert her thoughts whenever possible from what has happened. We mustn't allow her to grow morbid," and picking up his hat and gloves, he took his departure.

Rachel went to the window and watched him drive away in his car. An immense wind was roaring down the valley, tossing about the tall pine-trees as though they were bullrushes, and snarling through the bare branches of the elms and beeches like a pack of angry wolves.

"I wish the wind would cease," she said to herself wearily.

The storm began the previous evening. The first angry gusts came up while she was saying good-night to Peter Ruddock in the front porch. Since then it had

never ceased roaring. It had kept her awake most of the night. Fortunately it had lulled Phyllis to sleep. Phyllis loved the wind. Its voice always sounded friendly and comforting, and so with its deep solemn music in her ears she had fallen asleep and slept soundly till morning. That possibly had saved her reason.

When she awoke terror seized her and had held her in its grip ever since.

When the doctor's car had disappeared Rachel turned and went back to Phyllis's room. She was lying with her eyes closed, apparently oblivious to her surroundings. She took no notice of Rachel when she came into the room. Now and then a slight shudder ran through her and she shut her teeth tightly to keep them from chattering.

"Are you cold, dearie?" Rachel questioned, coming close to her bedside.

"No, Rachel," she said, in a voice that scarcely rose above a whisper, "but I'm terrified."

"Oh, that is foolish," Rachel replied consolingly. "Nothing can harm you here."

"You don't know, Rachel," and she opened her eyes and stared about her. "Don't you think we ought to get a policeman to guard the house?"

"Not unless you particularly wish it, dear," Rachel answered soothingly. "I'm not a bit afraid and I'm sure you need not be."

"But I am afraid, Rachel. That man will get me yet—I feel sure he will. I've escaped out of his hands twice—the third time you know——"

"There'll be no third time, dear. The chances are he'll be in prison for the next year or two——"

"But that will make him all the worse," she answered, with dilating eyes. "When he comes out he'll be sure

to try and get his revenge. Oh, you don't know him."

"I don't want to know him," Rachel smiled. "Anyhow, the man's a coward to resort to such mean tricks, and cowards never win."

"Oh, I don't know," and Phyllis closed her eyes again. "I used to think that the right always triumphed in the long-run——"

"Well, so it does, dear," Rachel interrupted. "Hasn't it triumphed in your case? All his plottings have come to nothing——"

"Not all of them, Rachel," she sighed. "Oh no, not all. By his lies and plotting he has robbed me of life's greatest gift. Some day, perhaps, I will tell you everything."

"I don't know what you refer to, of course," Rachel answered, knitting her brows. "But are you sure that he has robbed you—I mean for good and all? Things seem lost sometimes, but are not really. Time takes away, but it also restores. You are young yet, Phyl, and you don't know what the future holds."

"There are some things, Rachel," she sighed, "that time can never restore. You know that as well as I do. Oh, I was happy once—tremendously happy, but it was too good to last. Blow fell on blow. I think, dear, I should be glad to die."

"Oh, that is all nonsense," Rachel answered sharply. "You are just unnerved at present—which, after all, is not to be wondered at. You've had a frightful shock, but you must try to forget it. You've struck a dark patch in the shining way, that's all. The clouds will pass, never fear, and the sun will come out again. No one has any right to expect continuous sunshine. It's winter now, but spring will come again. God never forgets to bring round the seasons in their turn."

Phyllis closed her eyes and for a long time remained silent. After a while she spoke again.

"It's easy to believe, Rachel, when we are happy and everything goes well with us——"

"Exactly," Rachel interrupted, with a light laugh ; "but the great—the splendid thing is to believe when we are not happy, when everything seems to be wrong and the world is dark."

Phyllis sighed again. She felt too weak—too exhausted to argue. She could not understand this sudden feeling of helplessness that had dropped down on her. She had no desire to get up—no desire even to move. She just wanted to lie still. If only her mind would be still also. If only she could stop thinking. If only she could escape the haunting terror that was ever present. If only she could forget the awful experiences of the previous evening, but try as she would her thoughts persisted in harking back to it, and her teeth would chatter in spite of herself.

By what a narrow margin she had escaped ! She had listened to Johns's confession as he had unfolded the plot to the policeman. She had been too numbed at the time to grasp all its implications. She had not fully realised her danger when she got back to Pendare, and she had fallen asleep, worn out in mind and body. Now she saw everything with a clearness that appalled her. Another five minutes—another minute even—she would have been dropped into the yacht's gig and rowed out to the waiting yacht. Then nothing could have saved her. There were moments when she had to shut her teeth tightly to keep from shrieking. The terror of it, instead of diminishing, seemed to grow.

"Rachel," she said presently, "you won't leave me, will you ?"

"Of course I won't."

"I mean you won't mind sleeping in this room?"

"It was the very thing I was going to propose. I will give orders for a bed to be made up at once."

"And another thing, Rachel."

"Yes, dear?"

"Lucy must be given a month's wages and sent away."

"She has gone already," Rachel smiled. "She did not wait to be dismissed. When cook got down this morning she found that the bird had flown."

"That is a comfort," and she sighed again. "It's painful, Rachel, to have one's faith in people destroyed."

"That's true, dear, but don't forget that the vast majority of people are honest and trustworthy. No doubt Lucy was bribed heavily, and she had not strength enough to resist the temptation. Anyhow, you've only friends about you to-day."

"I know. I know. You are good to me, Rachel. What I should have done without you I can't imagine."

"Don't try, Phyl. You'll find me a sticker. Now I'm going to get you something to eat."

CHAPTER XXII

CONSPIRATORS

ONE afternoon early in the New Year Phyllis rather startled Rachel with the somewhat vague question :
“ Rachel, dear, do you think I ought to marry him ? ”

“ Marry him ? Marry whom ? ” Rachel questioned in a tone of surprise.

“ Why, Mr. Weekes, of course.”

Rachel dropped her knitting into her lap—she was busy on a jumper at the time—and her lips broke into a smile. “ I confess, Phyl, I see no particular reason why you should do so,” she answered slowly.

“ Well, he almost asked me last evening.”

“ Well, if he did, is that any reason why you should marry him ? ”

“ Not a reason, perhaps, but I shall have to decide sometime.”

“ Yes, I suppose you will, but is there any hurry ? ”

“ I think he is getting impatient. Men seem to be like that, you know.”

“ Really, Phyl,” and Rachel burst into a ripple of laughter. “ You speak as if you had had quite a wide experience of the sex.”

“ Don’t be nasty, Rachel. I don’t believe I should ever have thought about Mr. Weekes but for you—I mean seriously.”

“ Then you are thinking of him seriously ? ” Rachel questioned, picking up her work again.

“How can I help it, dear? He comes here frequently, as you know. You have admitted yourself that it is not good for a woman to be alone—especially one in my position. You know how nervous I am, and a man in the house after all *does* make a difference.”

“Yes, I admit all that,” Rachel said, knitting her brows reflectively, “but that does not seem a sufficient reason for accepting the first man that comes along.”

“But, Rachel, did you not tell me yourself that you would think twice before you refused any decent man who offered you marriage?”

“Did I? Well, old thing, you and I have said many foolish things during our long and chequered careers.”

“Then you have changed your opinions?” Phyllis questioned seriously.

“Hundreds of them,” Rachel laughed. “Consistency is a vice that we women are not supposed to be guilty of. Circumstances, you know, alter cases. But let us get down to hard facts. Do you particularly want to marry the curate?”

“Not particularly, of course. As a matter of fact I don’t *want* to marry at all.”

“Then you are not in love with Mr. Weekes?”

“You know I am not. How can I be? On the other hand, he is trustworthy and honest and sincere.”

“Do you think he is in love with you?”

“Oh, I suppose so. In a way, that is. I don’t think he is very sentimental, but he no doubt thinks I would make him a suitable wife——”

“Your money would help him very considerably?”

“I don’t think it is my money only. He never struck me as being mercenary. I believe he would rather give money to the church than spend it on himself.”

"Possibly, but don't forget, old thing, that clergymen are just as human as other people. If you were penniless, I doubt very much if he would want to marry you."

"Isn't that a bit uncharitable, Rachel?"

"I don't think so, dear. You see, in a matter so serious as this, we had better, if possible, get down to hard facts. We have got down to a few. Fact one: you are not in love with Mr. Weekes. Fact two: it is doubtful if he is in love with you. Fact three: you are in no fit state yet to consider marriage at all. Fact four: You are still suffering from a disappointment from which you have not yet had sufficient time to recover."

"Then you advise me to refuse him?"

For several moments Rachel continued to knit in silence. She did not want to take the responsibility of advising in a matter so important. She had come to the conclusion that, all things considered, Phyllis would be better married than single. In fact, she had come to the conclusion that all women would be better married than single, and that Nature had made a big blunder somewhere in not providing sufficient men to go round. In the case of Phyllis there were special reasons why she should not remain a spinster. With her wealth she was at the mercy of every fortune-hunter in the district. Also she was of much too trusting a nature for the hard and selfish rough-and-tumble of the world, and lastly there could be no doubt that Pendare needed the strong hand and the clear business brain of a man to direct its affairs.

On the other hand, she knew that Phyllis was still tasting the bitterness of a cruel disappointment. Phyllis had told her all about her meeting with Basil Tresillian, and the sweet and tender romance that had followed, as well as the story of its tragic ending. And though Rachel had little or no hope of their ever coming together again,

she could not help feeling that a hasty marriage on the part of Phyllis might be the greatest blunder she could commit.

"Look here, Phyl," she said presently, dropping her work again; "what I do advise, and advise strongly, is that you accept the invitation of the Bolithos and spend two or three months with them in the South of France."

"But haven't I told you, dear," Phyllis said a little fretfully, "that I don't want to leave Pendare, and that I absolutely dread undertaking such a long journey?"

"I know you have, Phyl, and you have disappointed the Colonel tremendously. Don't you think you would be wise to reconsider it? I am sure that Dr. Blake is right. You need change of scene, change of air, change of company. You are in danger of becoming morbid. For the last six weeks you have scarcely been outside the door. Half of that time you spent in bed."

"But I am rapidly getting better."

"Not nearly so rapidly as you ought. You are a long way from normal yet. Your appetite is pretty good and your strength is coming back, but your nerves are all over the place. You are in no condition at all to consider the question of marriage. Let Mr. Weekes wait. It will do him good not to see you for a few months, and it will do you good also. Get away from everything associated with the past year. Get a fresh outlook—a fresh point of view."

"But do you think I can possibly forget wherever I may be?"

"I am not suggesting that you forget," Rachel said sternly; "but there are different ways of remembering. You will not forget Dr. Tresillian, of course."

"Never, even if I were to live to be a thousand."

"You fancy that you love him still?"

"I don't fancy, Rachel dear, I know."

"And yet you talk about marrying David Weekes?"

"It might help me, don't you see—prevent me from indulging in foolish and impossible dreams."

"No, I don't see it at all. I only see that it might make the situation worse than ever. Phyl, my dear, I am more convinced than ever that you ought to get away for a while, and the sooner the better."

"Oh, but, Rachel, I should hate it."

"I don't care a rap how much you hate it," Rachel protested, "so long as you do it."

"But what would become of Pendare?" Phyllis pleaded.

"Oh, Beelzebub take Pendare," Rachel laughed, though she felt far more inclined to snarl. "Do you imagine that somebody will come with a wheelbarrow and take it away, or that some unexpected gust of wind will blow it down, or that Israel will undermine its foundations while digging in the garden? Do be sensible, Phyllis. I'll guarantee to run Pendare during your absence, and not run you into debt either."

"But would you stay here alone?"

"No, I wouldn't. I should expect 'Lijah, and Israe and Tommy, and Betty, and Alice, and the cook to remain, of course, to say nothing of Turk. Then, with your permission, I would invite my youngest sister to stay with me—a change would do her good. Now what do you say?"

"Oh, I don't know, Rachel. Give me time, dear, and I'll think about it."

A little later, when Phyllis had gone to her own room, Rachel went off to the library and, closing the door behind her, rang up Colonel Bolitho.

"Is that you, Colonel?" she questioned, as soon as his deep voice came to her over the wire. "Rachel Drew speaking."

"Oh yes, Miss Drew, how are you? Nothing gone wrong at Pendare, I hope?"

"Oh no. We are all pretty much as usual. I wanted to speak to you about Phyllis."

"Yes. She's bettering, I hope."

"Slowly. Much too slowly. But I think at last I have got her round to the idea of going with you to the South of France."

"Good."

"I've been talking to her this afternoon like a Dutch uncle or a Dutch aunt, and if she's not quite persuaded, she's almost. Now I want you to come over as soon as you can and clinch the matter—to-morrow if you can—she's as variable as the wind, and doesn't know her own mind two days on the stretch."

"I'll come with pleasure."

"Don't for the world let her know I've rung you up. Drop in casual, as it were; and be firm with her. She'll be doing something foolish if she stays here much longer."

"How? In what way?"

"Well—*sub rosa*, you understand?"

"Quite."

"I don't know if you have met our curate, Mr. Weekes. Well, he wants to marry her, and I don't want him to. It would be a mistake——"

"Is she in love with him?"

"Not a bit: but for the moment his is the stronger will. I keep them apart as much as possible, but if he has the chance I'm afraid he'll over-persuade her. She can be stubborn enough in some things, but in this matter

I think she's inclined to yield. Our talk this afternoon has worried me a good deal."

"What's your objection to him?"

"Oh, I have no objection to him as a man—at least, not much—but that is not the point, Colonel. At present she doesn't know her own mind, and is in no condition to decide a matter of so much importance——"

"Yes, yes. I quite agree with you."

"You see, if they could be kept apart for two or three months she would have time to recover herself—to get back to her normal condition. At present, don't you see, the dice is loaded against her. He comes here constantly, and she hasn't the courage to tell him to stay away."

"Could not you give him a hint?"

"I've done my best, but he isn't good at taking hints."

"Thick-skinned, eh?"

"Rather, I should say. Mind you, I don't want to say a word against him. He's all right . . . Quite a good sort if you understand . . . Not particularly brainy . . . Dogmatic, of course. But—but—you see, I want Phyl to be quite herself again before she decides. If when she gets back to normal she decides to accept him, that's her look-out."

"I understand . . . quite, quite . . . I'll run along to-morrow without fail."

"Thanks, Colonel," and she hung up the receiver.

On the following afternoon the curate and the Colonel arrived together—or at the best within two or three minutes of each other.

Phyllis was so delighted at seeing her old trustee and friend that she paid scant attention to the curate, much to the latter's annoyance. He took a violent dislike to the Colonel on the spot. Religiously he was intolerant of all soldiers, believing that no soldier could be a Christian,

and that no Christian could be a soldier. He believed many other things which from motives of prudence he kept to himself.

The two men looked at each other with appraising eyes. The contrast was a little startling. The Colonel polished, urbane, courteous, unaffected. The curate uneasy, unpolished, dogmatic, and slightly truculent. His effort to appear quite at ease made him self-conscious.

The Colonel was not only a soldier but a student. His library was one of the best in the county. He kept himself fully abreast of modern thought and discovery. The curate was not a student, nor even studious. He was not built that way. All his reading had been directed toward a particular end. Rachel said that "the Church" was his deity, and in her terse way she often got near the truth. Had he been more widely read he would have been perhaps less dogmatic; had he thought more he would have seen that there is more than one side to most questions. Narrowness of view breeds intolerance. Ignorance is often the parent of bigotry.

Over the tea-table the two men monopolised the conversation. The soldier baited the cleric. Mr. Weekes was easily drawn. It was one of his charms as a preacher that he was so certain of himself. Other men might have doubts—he had none. His theological system was compact of all knowledge to which nothing could be added and from which nothing could be subtracted.

The Colonel avoided argument. His part in the conversation consisted mainly of questions. The curate got into his stride without difficulty. He felt it a privilege to be able to enlighten the Colonel's ignorance. Unwittingly he committed himself to quite a number of very striking propositions. Rachel, who had a legal mind—inherited

perhaps from her father—listened in amazement. Phyllis in some curious way felt hurt. She wished that the Colonel would cease asking questions or that Mr. Weekes would cease answering them. Every moment he floundered more and more deeply, and the curious thing was he didn't see it. At one moment she wanted to come to his rescue, the next she felt angry with him. Why did he assert and dogmatise when, when——?

She rose from the table at length and put a sudden end to the talk. Mr. Weekes looked immensely pleased with himself, and smiled as a victor might after a gladiatorial display. His dislike of the Colonel turned to pity.

The curate was the first to leave—much against his inclination—but having an important engagement it was impossible to stay longer. He had come that afternoon with the intention of proposing to Phyllis in a quite definite and unmistakable way, and it was annoying to have to leave with his fate still hanging in the balance. His only comfort was that he had shown the woman of his choice a sample of his dialectical skill, and proved to her that a priest not only could be, but actually was, a much greater man than a soldier.

When he had gone the Colonel remarked in the most casual way, "Your curate, girls, appears to have spent his life in the backwoods."

"What do you mean by that, Colonel?" Rachel questioned, with a merry twinkle in her eyes.

But the Colonel refused to be drawn. "No more theology or metaphysics," he laughed. "I've come here on business, and the sooner we get to it the better."

Phyllis looked up inquiringly.

"Nothing serious, my girl," he said, meeting her eyes frankly. "I've come to give you your marching orders. That's all."

"My marching orders?"

He nodded, and smiled into her eyes. "Mother and I and Judy are off to the Riviera on Monday, and you've got to come along with us."

"Oh, but, Colonel dear——"

"No, Phyl," and he laughed in his big hearty fashion. "When a young lady is unable to make up her mind to do the right thing, it is quite time somebody made it up for her."

"But on Monday, dear——"

"Well, what's amiss with Monday? The sooner you get away for a complete change the better. I've had a talk with Blake over the 'phone and he's quite definite on the point."

"But, Colonel, I've no clothes."

"Then you shall get 'em in London or Paris. We shall stay a day or two in both places. Judy pretends that she needs a complete rig-out. So you can do your shopping together. . . . Any more excuses?"

"Oh yes. Scores—hundreds."

"Then we'll listen to them after we get started; there's no time now."

"Oh, but you are incorrigible."

"I know it. I came with that intention. You've been putting me off with pettifogging excuses for the last month. I'm not having any more. I'm going to be obeyed."

"Oh, you old grizzly-bear," and she laughed for the first time since her illness.

"Then it's settled, Phyl?"

"I suppose so . . . You say it is. So it doesn't seem as if there is anything more to be said," and she sprang to her feet and kissed him on the forehead.

"Now you are talking sensibly," and he laughed. "What say you, Miss Drew?"

“ The very thing I have been urging,” Rachel smiled.

“ That I should talk sensibly ? ” Phyllis quizzed.

“ No, that you should act sensibly,” Rachel retorted.

The Colonel's keen eyes twinkled and he laughed heartily. “ Now I will leave you two girls,” he said, “ to settle things for yourselves.”

CHAPTER XXIII

OUTMANŒUVRED

ON the following day the Colonel appeared at Pendare again. He had been thinking things over. He had consulted his wife, and he had come to the conclusion that if Phyllis was to be saved from falling into the arms of Mr. Weekes she would have to be got away from Pendare at once.

"The child has no will of her own," he said to Mrs. Bolitho. "I mean by that, that she is easily dominated by a stronger will. Why, yesterday, when I put my foot down firmly she just crumpled up, as it were—gave in at all points. She doesn't want to go with us—hates the idea, in fact; but just because I took a strong line—told her that she *had* to go—she gave way with scarcely any fuss at all."

"Well?" questioned his wife.

"You see, don't you, what I'm driving at? Between now and Monday the curate will get his chance, and if I'm not mistaken in the man he will make the most of it. He may not be overburdened with learning or intellect, but the fellow has great driving power. When it comes to close grips Phyllis will be as a child in his hands. He may not try to persuade her to remain at home, but he will certainly try to force her into an engagement, and if she once gives her promise she will stick to it, though she die for it."

"And you think that would be a mistake?"

"I should think it would be a crime," he asserted, his eyes fierce, his moustache bristling. "The child has not fully recovered yet from that terrible shock. Her will-power is at zero. Moreover, she is not in love with him. I think in some ways she rather admires him—you know how 'the cloth' attracts women—but he's not the man for her. Phyl's brainy, clever, well-read, and for her age, cultured. Weekes is none of these things; between ourselves he's raw, primitive, out-of-date, behind the age. Great Scott! such a marriage would be the death of her."

"Well, what do you propose to do?"

"Fetch her here and keep her until we start—at least till Sunday night. I'm taking no risks. I feel responsible for her. She's no one but me to look to, and she's a girl in a thousand. Considering everything—that uncle of hers, and the way she's had to fend for herself—she's a wonder."

"Well, you know, Henry, I shall be delighted to have her here for a few days."

The Colonel found Phyllis much more pliable than he had expected. She scarcely raised an objection. She seemed quite content to place herself in his hands and do what she was told.

When she had gone upstairs to get ready, Rachel turned to the Colonel. "You did not tell her the real reason why you wanted to get her away from here?"

"No."

"You want to keep her and the curate apart during the next few days?"

"I do."

"Colonel, you are a treasure. I feel so delighted that I would like—never mind what," and she blushed like a brier-rose. "Do you know, I've been dreading the next few days."

"Do you think she guesses?"

"I'm wondering. I don't quite understand her extreme pliability. She seems quite pleased to go with you."

"Perhaps she is a bit afraid herself."

"Do you know, the same thought has occurred to me. She was very quiet all last evening, and his name has not been mentioned since."

"Well, here she comes. We shall most likely find out some day. And I'm bound to say, Miss Rachel, you're a brick."

"Thanks: but you might have called me something less hard and unattractive," and she laughed good-humouredly.

When the Colonel and Phyllis had driven away, Rachel sat down and wrote a letter to her sister Kitty, after which she began sorting and arranging various articles that Phyllis would need during her absence abroad.

When evening came she began to feel a bit lonely. The house seemed strangely quiet, and Turk appeared to be fretting or sulking, she did not know which. After dinner the door-bell rang and Peter Ruddock was shown in. Instantly her face brightened and her eyes sparkled with pleasure.

Peter had come to talk over some business matters with Phyllis, but he was nothing loath to talk with Rachel instead. He had profound admiration for the young mistress of Pendare, but in his eyes she was not a patch on Rachel. The opinion he had expressed to his mother at the beginning of their acquaintance, that she was the "most understanding young woman he had ever met," was more than confirmed by his subsequent visits. Her brightness, her resource, her unfailing good-humour, her sound common sense, to say nothing of her good looks,

had carried Peter's heart by storm. To spend an hour in her company was like being in paradise. He would sit and look at her out of the corner of his eye in sheer amazement and delight. The glory of her hair, the liquid beauty of her eyes, the dimples in her cheeks, the smiles that twisted her ruby lips, the audacious thrust of her little chin, filled Peter with a rapture that was inexpressible. That he might ever win such a treasure scarcely occurred to him. She was as much above him as the stars. A creature to be worshipped at a distance. To be allowed to bask in the sunshine of her presence for a few minutes now and then was a privilege far above his deserts.

"Do sit down, Mr. Ruddock," Rachel said brightly, pushing an easy-chair near the fire. "I'm all alone. Miss Dean has gone to spend a few days with the Bolithos, and to tell you the truth I'm feeling a wee bit lonely. I'm so glad you've come."

Peter's eyes shone and his face glowed. The warmth of his greeting so overwhelmed him that for a few moments he could say nothing.

"You can smoke if you like," she went on, smiling at him.

"You are sure you won't mind?" Peter gasped, darting a shy glance in her direction.

"Of course I won't mind. I like men to smoke, and, to be quite frank, I like the smell of tobacco."

"Some ladies strongly object," Peter said timidly, pulling his pipe out of his pocket and beginning slowly to fill it.

"Oh, no doubt; but thank goodness I'm not one of them. I like to see men comfortable; beside, they talk ever so much better when they have a pipe or a cigar between their teeth," and she struck a match and passed it on to him.

Peter thrilled when his fingers touched hers.

"Now tell me all the news," she went on. "I haven't been to St. Runton for nearly a week."

After that Peter could not help talking. His diffidence melted in the brightness of her smile. What he said he could never afterwards remember. He could only remember what she said, and how she looked, and how her hair rippled in the light like liquid gold, and how her voice fell like music on his ears.

The moments passed unheeded. Time was of no account. When at length he rose to go she went with him to the door. "Run in again on Saturday evening if you can," she said at parting. "There are quite a lot of things I want to talk to you about."

Peter's heart gave a sudden thump, and then seemed to race like a locomotive. "Won't I just," he gasped, and he gave her hand a squeeze that made her wince.

"Peter's a dear," she reflected, as she returned to her chair and to a book.

On Saturday afternoon Mr. Weekes arrived. He came as usual in time for tea. He had carefully rehearsed the speech he intended to make. It was a good speech—cogent, persuasive, and sufficiently sentimental. From his point of view it would answer all objections, smooth out all difficulties, and lead Phyllis to complete surrender.

When he was informed that she was not at home his face was a study in expression. Surprise, disappointment, chagrin, anger, swept across his countenance like cloud shadows across a landscape.

"Not at home?" he snapped, and he stared at Rachel as if in some way she were to blame.

"She has gone to spend a few days with the Bolithos," Rachel remarked quietly.

"Oh, hang the Bolithos," he flung out impatiently. "I beg pardon! You see, I wanted to see her particularly."

"Perhaps you could leave a message?" Rachel smiled sweetly.

He ignored the suggestion and walked to the window and stared out across the lawn.

"Or if the matter is very urgent you might speak to her over the telephone," Rachel intimated.

The scowl deepened on his face, and he continued to stare at nothing in particular.

"I will call again," he said sullenly, and he swung round on his heel.

"To-morrow, perhaps?" she inquired in her most gracious manner.

"Not to-morrow, of course. To-morrow is the Sabbath," and he looked at her with severe disapproval for suggesting such a thing.

"I beg your pardon. I will tell her, of course, that you have called."

"Thank you. Good afternoon," he said frigidly, and he made for the door.

"You are not staying to tea?"

"Not to-day. No," and the next moment he was gone.

"In a temper, eh?" Rachel smiled to herself and returned to her work.

When Peter called that evening he found her in great good humour and quite prepared for a long and friendly talk. She told him that she expected her sister Kitty on Monday afternoon. That Phyllis and the Bolithos were starting for the South of France on Monday morning. That the curate had called that afternoon and refused to stay to tea, and that she was beginning to feel the responsibility of keeping house for so long a time.

Peter sat on the other side of the fireplace and pulled at his pipe in sheer delight. He did not talk very much, he was content to listen, and watch the movements of her shapely and capable hands.

"I expect Kitty and I will feel a bit lonely at first," she reflected aloud.

"May I call occasionally?" Peter questioned, startled at his own temerity.

"You might now and then," she said, without raising her eyes, "that is, if it would not be too much trouble. I'm afraid we shall not be able to reckon on Mr. Weekes."

Peter walked home that evening feeling as though he trod on air. Rachel was becoming more and more gracious every time they met.

On the following evening Phyllis returned appearing all the better for the change. Her eyes were brighter, her step more elastic.

"The Bolithos are dears," she confided to Rachel, "and I've really enjoyed myself."

"You are going to have a good time abroad," Rachel assured her. "I'm quite sure of it."

"I hope so. I don't shrink from it nearly as much as I did."

"I've got everything ready for you. Your boxes are all strapped, and a taxi will be here in good time, so you musn't worry about anything."

"Rachel, you are a dear," Phyllis said impulsively.

"Of course I am," Rachel laughed, "and so are you. By the by, Mr. Weekes called to see you yesterday afternoon."

"Yes?"

"He would not stay to tea—said he would call again."

Phyllis made no reply, but gave her attention to Turk, who was trying to make her understand how delighted he was to see her back again.

They arrived in good time at the station on the following morning. The Bolithos were already on the platform. Only Dr. Blake and Peter Ruddock knew of Phyllis's departure, and they both turned up to see her off. Peter received a few instructions from Phyllis concerning the lodge that was in course of erection, and then the train lumbered on.

There were tears, of course, and kisses, and good-byes, and waving of hands, and then the train, like a huge snake, glided smoothly out of the station.

Rachel wiped her eyes and heaved a big sigh of relief. She had been on pins and needles for days, fearing that at the last moment Phyllis would turn stubborn and refuse to go. It was as though a danger-point that she had seen ahead of her had been safely passed. Now she could breathe freely again. She would miss Phyllis, of course—miss her horribly, but that was nothing in comparison with the well-being and happiness of her friend.

She returned in the hired taxi to Pendare and then set to work to comfort Turk, who appeared to be in the last stages of dejection.

She had no time to mope herself. Scarcely had the lunch been cleared away when Mr. Weekes appeared once more on the scene. His lips were set in resolute lines, his whole attitude that of fierce determination.

"Miss Dean has returned, I am told," he said shortly.

"She returned last evening," Rachel replied, with a mischievous smile.

"Will you tell her that I am here, please?" His manner was peremptory and slightly truculent. Rachel resented it and showed it in her reply.

"As it happens you cannot see her." Her tone was icy, almost biting.

"Not see her?"

"No, you cannot."

"And for why?"

"For the simple reason she is not here."

"Not here?" his truculence had turned to astonishment. "Why, you admitted a moment ago that she had returned."

"She returned last evening and left again this morning."

"Left again?" He seemed to shrink into himself. His confident manner gave place to a look of dejection. "I do not understand, Miss Drew."

"It is quite easily explained," she smiled. "She left this morning by the nine o'clock train for London on her way to the South of France."

"The South of France?" he gasped. "Then she will be away some considerable time?"

"I expect for at least three months."

Mr. Weekes bowed his head and stood for several moments as if deep in thought.

When he spoke again it was to say "good afternoon." Then he turned and walked slowly out of the house. He looked a little longingly at the stately trees, the wide lawns, the pleasant prospect. He had hoped to be master of this fair demesne, now it seemed to be slipping from his grasp. He was terribly angry with himself for not having spoken. Why had he not pressed his advantage when he had the opportunity? She had been in the mood to yield when last he was alone with her. Had he been more deeply in love he would have taken her in his arms and compelled her to give him an affirmative.

That had been the trouble. After deciding that some day he would ask her to be his wife, he had hoped that his admiration and liking would grow into deep and passionate love. They had not so grown. Yet, as time had gone by, he had seen more and more clearly the worldly advantage of such an alliance ; which was almost the same thing as an ecclesiastical advantage. With her wealth to play with, what might he not accomplish ? He might even become a bishop. He might do an amount of good in the world such as before he never dreamed of. He would be perfectly justified in sacrificing mere human love for the sake of the greater good.

Now he saw his dreams fading with a swiftness that was appalling. His hope of winning her consent lay in her weakness, in her lack of will-power. He was well aware of the fact that she did not love him any more than he loved her. He had hoped that she would grow to love him. He saw no reason why she shouldn't. Women loved so much more easily than men. He had delayed proposing to her hoping she would fall into his arms.

Every time he visited Pendare his dreams brightened and expanded. Phyllis was a dainty little thing and he liked her immensely. Pendare opened up ever-widening possibilities. If Phyllis were ugly he would be prepared to marry her for the sake of what Pendare would bring him. Sometimes he tried to persuade himself that he was really and truly in love with her. Anyhow, he was not indifferent to her charms, and he had grown to be profoundly in love with her fortune.

Hence, what he suffered from, as he made his way back to his lodgings, was not wounded affection but a baffled purpose. He had been so sure of himself, and, latterly, so sure of Phyllis, that this set-back angered him almost beyond endurance.

It was more than a set-back, it was a rout. It was not a bit of use shutting his eyes to facts. Phyllis restored to her normal health and strength would not look at him ; and of course in three months she would have completely recovered.

He felt vaguely that he had been cheated—out-manœuvred. He paused in his walk and reflected. Yes, that was it. He had been out-manœuvred. That sharp-eyed, impertinent girl Rachel Drew had seen what he was after and had got that crafty old soldier, Colonel Bolitho, to assist her, and between them they had spiked his guns.

For the first time in his ministerial career he appreciated the imprecatory Psalms. He had been in favour of leaving them out of the Prayer-Book. He was in favour of such a course no longer.

CHAPTER XXIV

RACHEL TAKES A HAND

THE days passed pleasantly and therefore quickly. February came with the "feel" of spring in the air. The skies were more deeply blue and the fields more richly green. The jasmine began to unfold its golden petals, and the almonds blushed at the kiss of the sun. Every evening the throstles proclaimed from the tree-tops that spring was coming, and the blackbirds fluted in chorus.

Kitty Drew searched the woods for primroses and filled the vases with catkin-laden sprigs. Rachel let her ramble where she liked. Pendare was like a new world to her and she enjoyed every moment of her stay.

Rachel was quietly happy. The house ran like clock-work, and she and Betty had become bosom friends. Turk appeared to have transferred his affections to the newcomer and accompanied Kitty in most of her rambles. Twice a week a letter came from Phyllis, and Rachel was quick to notice a steady increase in cheerfulness.

Mr. Weekes gave up calling at Pendare. He told Miss Deersly that he disliked Rachel Drew and considered that her influence on Miss Dean was anything but good. Peter Ruddock found any number of excuses for calling to see Rachel. She seemed to grow more and more wonderful in his eyes. His diffidence made his love almost pathetic. He wanted her as he had never wanted anything else on earth, but he was afraid to tell her so.

To confess his love might put an end to their friendship, and that would mean turning his paradise into a desert. So long as his secret went unguessed by her she would be friendly and vivacious and altogether delightful, but if she got a suspicion that he was aspiring she might shut down the lid and leave him in utter despair. So he kept himself well in hand, thrilled to the finger-tips when she smiled into his eyes, and was humbly grateful for any crumb of approval that might fall from her lips.

Kitty looked on with the mature wisdom of a flapper of fifteen and concluded that Rachel was very slow in the uptake. It was as clear as moonshine what was in Peter's mind, and if Rachel had not sense enough to see it that was her look-out, she (Kitty) was not going to enlighten her.

Of the fate of Sir John Tresize nothing was known. The *Lapwing* had called at no British port, nor could she be traced to any port in France, or Portugal, or Spain, hence the belief had grown almost to a certainty that she had foundered in the great gale and would never be heard of again. Buddle and Johns were doing time in Bodmin Gaol.

About a month after Phyllis's departure Rachel and Peter spent nearly an hour together in the library of Pendare. Kitty was absorbed in a novel in the drawing-room.

Nothing of any importance was discussed by the young people. They had talked about the new lodge that was nearing completion ; about the chances of Tresize ever being heard of again ; about Mr. Weekes's avoidance of Pendare ; about the growing cheerfulness of Phyllis's letters, but not a word about what was uppermost in Peter's mind and which filled his heart almost to the

exclusion of everything else. Peter had risen to take his departure and they were standing face to face near the door.

For a moment silence fell between them. Then Peter exploded : " Rachel Drew," he said, " you are the most beautiful thing God Almighty ever made, and I love you—love you. God alone knows how much I love you——" He stopped suddenly, for his breath had given out ; also terror seized him. He felt as though he had wrecked with his own hands his beautiful house of dreams.

" Really, Peter ? " and she looked with misty eyes up into his face and smiled.

" You are not angry, are you ? " he gasped. " I really couldn't help it. I do love you. Oh, I do love you. I didn't mean to make a fool of myself by telling you, but the words were out before I was aware."

" But why shouldn't you tell me, Peter ? " she questioned shyly.

" Oh, for every reason. You are so much above me in every way. If there was only a chance of your loving me just a little——"

" But, Peter dear, I love you quite a lot," she whispered.

For a moment he looked into her liquid eyes as if doubting his own senses. " No," he gasped, " you don't mean it ? Oh, Rachel ! my love, my life——"

The next moment he had taken her in his arms—gently, tenderly, reverently—and his lips found hers.

Time stood still. The world was forgotten.

Later—neither of them knew how much later—they found themselves sitting side by side on the big couch talking of sweet and intimate things.

They did not notice the door open. Kitty, who had finished her novel, came in search of another book. For a moment she stood still and looked at them, then she remarked sapiently : " I suppose you young things think you are in love with each other."

" I'm in love with Rachel, anyhow," Peter replied with new-found courage.

" My hat ! " and Kitty flung back her head contemptuously. " I fancy I had better make myself scarce," and she turned and marched out of the room.

" Wise child ! " Peter remarked.

Rachel laughed and pressed her face closer to his.

Thereafter Rachel felt so happy that she wanted everybody else to be happy ; particularly Phyllis, who had been cheated out of life's greatest gift. She even wanted Mr. Weekes to be happy, but not happy in the way he desired.

On the following day, directly after lunch, she started out for a long walk into the country with Turk as her only companion. She wanted to be alone to think and dream. The quiet of the deep country lanes suited her mood. Life had grown so wonderful, so beautiful, so full of new meanings, that household duties seemed stale and commonplace. She wanted to think of Peter, and the great, wonderful mystery of his love.

It was a bright afternoon with a pale blue sky and a cold wind blowing in from the sea. She took no notice of Turk, who ran hither and thither sniffing at the banks for rabbits or stoats or fieldmice or any other live thing that might be hiding in its burrow. Neither did she pay any attention to a small motor-car that was approaching slowly.

The car came to a standstill and a gentleman got out. Rachel came to herself with a start.

"I beg pardon," said a pleasant voice, "but could you tell me——?"

The next moment Turk was gambolling about his feet and jumping up to lick his hand.

"Hello, Turk, old man," he said, leaning down and patting the dog's head. "Shake hands, then!"

Rachel looked her surprise, but her brain worked rapidly.

"Then you know Turk?" she questioned, feeling her way to the truth.

"Oh yes," he smiled. "Turk and I made each other's acquaintance many months ago."

By this time Rachel felt certain. "You are Dr. Tresillian?" she ventured.

"Tresillian is my name," he said quietly. His eyes asked: "But who are you?"

"I had better introduce myself," Rachel laughed. "I am the friend and companion of Miss Dean. My name is Rachel Drew and I live at Pendare."

A sudden interest flashed into his eyes.

"Yes?" he questioned. "I hope Miss Dean is well."

"I think she is nearly well again," Rachel answered. "She is in the South of France at present. She has had a long and trying illness—shock, you know."

"Yes, yes. I read about it in the papers—a most dastardly affair: and following the death of her uncle. I sincerely hope she will soon be all right again——"

He paused for a moment and looked her frankly in the eyes. "But I must apologise, Miss Drew, for stopping you in this fashion. I fear I have lost my way. That's why I pulled up. Could you tell me how I can get to Restover Farm?"

"Why, of course; but you will have to turn round

and go the other way. Do you remember the cross-roads a mile back ? ”

He nodded.

“ Well, you should have turned to the left instead of coming straight on. Half a mile down the road you will see another turn to the right ; take that, and the first farm you come to is Restover.”

“ Thanks very much,” and he raised his hat and smiled. Then he slipped into his car and proceeded to turn round in the narrow space the road allowed.

Rachel was thinking hard. Should she, or should she not ? There was no time to be wasted. It was now or never.

Suddenly she slipped up to his side. “ Dr. Tresillian,” she said, a little breathless, “ I should like to speak to you—not now, of course—but some time when you are free—there are one or two things you ought to know——”

“ Yes ? ” he questioned, a look of inquiry in his eyes.

“ If you could call at Pendare some day when you are in the neighbourhood——”

“ I could call this afternoon, for that matter,” he replied. “ I shall not be detained long at Restover.”

“ Thank you very much. The Jagos will direct you the nearest way. You will find me waiting for you,” and with a smile she turned away.

She had only just time to change her dress, straighten her wind-blown hair, and put on a pair of dainty house-slippers before Dr. Tresillian was announced.

For a moment or two he stood before the fire warming his fingers, then he dropped into an easy-chair she indicated. Rachel watched him narrowly. She liked him. There was something fine in his lean, intellectual face.

She liked the curve of his jaw, the firm cleft chin, the mobile, expressive mouth.

"He is nearly as good-looking as Peter," she reflected. "Nearly, but not quite."

"I don't know what you will think of me, Dr. Tresillian," she began, seating herself slowly in an easy-chair opposite him. "I suppose all women are more or less creatures of impulse, but let that pass. I feel that what I am going to tell you is due to you and also due to Phyllis. She is my dearest friend, you understand. The last time you met she was very rude to you, and she feels it very much—regrets it very much, and yet it was not her fault. You had rendered her a great service and she is one who never forgets a kindness. She is one of the most generous creatures alive, hence the thought of being unjust to you hurts, for she could never be unjust to anyone intentionally——"

She paused and knitted her brows.

"Please go on," he said, leaning forward with questioning eyes.

"It is not very easy, Dr. Tresillian, to say things as they ought to be said," and she smiled; "but as I understand it, the evening before your last meeting her uncle confided to her a story he had heard in St. Runton. A story that seemed straightforward and circumstantial. It was told him by a man that said he knew you in Canada——"

"And the story, Miss Drew?" Tresillian questioned, with a little catch in his breath.

"The story was that you had a wife in Canada whom you had deserted."

"*Mon Dieu!*" he gasped, and half rose from his chair, then sat down again. His face had grown deadly pale, his lips livid.

"You came to see her the following afternoon, I

understand," Rachel went on. "What you said to her is no concern of mine——"

"And she still believes this story?" he questioned eagerly.

"No, no. A few days before her uncle's death she learned that the story was a fabrication—that there was no truth in it. That it had been invented by Sir John Tresize, who had become jealous of you, and wanted to keep you and Phyllis apart."

For several moments he stared into the fire like a man stunned and whose brain refused to function. Once or twice he brushed his hand slowly across his forehead as though he wanted to straighten out some mental tangle.

"You see, the story was never made public," Rachel continued, after a long pause. "It was invented for Phyllis's ears alone. Hence it never reached you or any of your friends."

"*Mon Dieu!*" he gasped again, and he clenched his hands so tightly that his knuckles showed white.

Neither of them spoke again for several minutes. The short February day was dying rapidly. Twilight began to fill the room. Then Rachel spoke again.

"I hope, Dr. Tresillian, you do not think I have exceeded my duty or betrayed a confidence."

"Heavens, no!" he interrupted. "I shall always be grateful to you. You have made clear what has puzzled me for months."

"Then I hope you will stay and have tea with us. My sister Kitty will be pleased to see you."

But he did not reply, neither did he move. His eyes were still on the fire, but he did not see it, he saw something far beyond it—something that made him oblivious to his surroundings.

Then the tea-gong sounded and he came slowly back to himself.

"Tea is ready," Rachel smiled, and he rose and followed her into the drawing-room, though he scarcely realised what he was doing.

Kitty, however, soon engaged his attention. The flapper had no shyness and she was always thirsting for information. She informed Rachel later in the day that she considered Dr. Tresillian fifty times handsomer than Peter Ruddock.

Tresillian drove home like a man in a dream. It was a clear, moonlight night and the roads were almost deserted, but it took him two hours to cover a distance that he could easily have done in less than one. He remembered nothing of the way, he guided his car almost automatically. His thoughts were back in other days. He recalled his first meeting with Phyllis and how she captivated his fancy and took his heart by storm. Recalled his visit to Pendare and his talk with her under the copper beech. Recalled her visit to his mother, and then that wonderful day at Tintagel. His memory had treasured almost her every look and word. For months past he had been trying to repress his love; now it boiled and surged again like a volcano. Hope once more sprang alive in his heart. He had still a chance of winning her.

The old question "Why?" which had haunted him like a persistent ghost was now fully answered. He was not surprised that horror had flashed in her eyes or that indignation had thrilled in her voice. He rather wondered at her calmness and restraint.

She had looked upon him as a blackguard of the worst type—a man without honour or decency.

The thought of that hideous story made him

writhe. The cunning and cruelty of it—the low-down treachery.

“If that beast perished in the storm,” he reflected, “he only got his deserts, and the world is well rid of him.”

CHAPTER XXV

ON THE WING

ONE morning at breakfast Tresillian remarked casually, "I am going to take a holiday, mother."

She looked up at him and smiled. "And quite right, too, Basil. You deserve a holiday if anybody does, and since you have become an oil-king you can afford it."

"Oh yes, I can afford it all right," he laughed. "Buying that plot of land was a piece of sheer good luck."

"And you needn't work any more now," she smiled. "I wonder you have not given up before."

"But, mother dear, I've not the least intention of giving up work," he laughed. "On the contrary, I see the prospect of much harder work in the future."

"But why, Basil?"

"Because there are so many millions of suffering people in the world who ought not to be suffering. We've succeeded in stamping out a good many diseases—we've got to stamp out all of them. Pestilence must be rendered impossible. We've got to track down every mischievous microbe and slay the little beast."

"You make me laugh sometimes," she said, "with your ceaseless hunt for germs and microbes."

"Do I? Well, I can tell you it is the most exciting and inspiring hunt in the world, and now that I can afford it I intend to provide myself with the most up-to-date laboratory known."

“And you are going to work for nothing?”

He laughed again. “No, you dear old thing, I am going to work for love, and for the benefit of the human race.”

“It’s very noble of you, of course,” she said reflectively, “but I question if anybody will thank you.”

“Very likely, mother. It’s just possible that the present generation will never know what I am doing or, at any rate, trying to do. But what of that? I may find out something that may be a blessing to the generations to come.”

“And all the while—if you must work—you might be doctoring people.”

“But don’t you realise, mother, that prevention is better than cure. Most people ought not to need doctoring. It’s a great thing, no doubt, to find a cure, but it’s a far greater thing to discover the cause. I’m not so anxious to cure diseases as to prevent them.”

“Oh well, my boy, I know you will go your own way whatever your old mother says,” she smiled. “When do you start on your holiday?”

“Next week. I have to read a paper before the Medical Research Society in London, as you know. Well, instead of coming straight back, I intend to run down to the South of France.”

“It will be warm there, I expect?”

“I hope so.”

A week later he was speeding through France, his heart beating high with hope and expectation. He had secured a sleeper, but he did not sleep. He filled the night with waking dreams. He pictured his meeting with Phyllis—her look of wonder and astonishment. Would she be glad to see him, or would she be angered? Would he see welcome in her eyes or would he discover that his

journey had been in vain ? The hours seemed interminable. He resented every pause in the journey. He was impatient to know the best or the worst. At one moment he felt hopeful—even confident ; the next he would be in the throes of despair.

He had so little on which to build his hopes. He had known her so short a time—had seen so little of her. She had seemed to like him, but a girl's liking might quickly change. In the long months that had intervened she had had time to put him out of her thoughts.

Rachel Drew's intervention might mean nothing. On the other hand, it might mean a great deal. How much did Rachel know ? She had given no hint of Phyllis's real feelings. Her only concern seemed to be to defend Phyllis against a charge of rudeness or injustice. Did her concern go deeper than that ?

So he fretted himself with questions for which he could find no answer, battled with doubts which he could not wholly conquer, and clung to hopes which had little more foundation than a dream.

At Cannes disappointment met him. The Bolithos had left a week previously for Monte Carlo. So there was nothing for it but to cancel his room and take the next train to Monte Carlo. He arrived after dark to find the gardens almost deserted and the Casino thronged with people of all nationalities.

After a hurried glance round he went off to his hotel and to bed. Ten hours of unbroken sleep restored him to cheerfulness. When he awoke his room was full of light, the sun was shining in a cloudless sky, and the sea stretched away into the distance with scarcely a ripple.

After a hasty breakfast he went out into the garden and wandered up and down the broad gravelled paths in front

of the Casino, keeping a sharp look out for the dear face he had come so far to see. Getting tired at length he seated himself in the shade of a broad-leafed palm and watched the moving crowd. He wondered if in the wide world there was another crowd like it. Not a happy-looking crowd by any means—a crowd that looked bored and anxious and ill at ease. It gave one no sense of rest or even of enjoyment. Basil fell to speculating as to who these people were and what aim they had in life.

He got up at length and made for the Palace Hotel. The suspense was becoming intolerable. He wanted to come upon Phyllis unawares, to meet her unexpectedly. Why was she not out walking with the rest and enjoying the brilliant sunshine? He felt so certain of meeting her that morning.

At the hotel disappointment met him again. The Bolithos had stayed only four days and had gone forward into Italy. Letters were to be forwarded to Bellaggio. Basil turned away with a sinking at his heart. Was he to be always in the rear—ever following but never overtaking?

Coming across the hall-porter he inquired about trains.

“Oh yes, there was a train that afternoon. Had monsieur a passport?”

“Passport? Did he need a passport to go from France into Italy?” His disappointment turned to annoyance. He was irritated—angry. How utterly absurd and childish! He had been angry in London because he was not allowed to go to France without a passport. He had been delayed two full days in consequence. Now he was up against a similar pettifogging regulation. He wondered how much further Government red-tape would extend.

With the assistance of the British Consul he managed at length to get a fresh passport, but it took him four days to complete the business—four days of irritation and annoyance. He was impatient to be on his way, but officialism was never in a hurry.

He arrived in Milan too utterly tired out to proceed farther that day. Moreover, it was doubtful if he could get farther than Como if he tried. He would have liked to have gone on to Venice as he was so near. He had never seen Venice and was curious to make its acquaintance, but Venice would have to wait. Some other time, perhaps. Nothing mattered now but Phyllis. He had come half across Europe to find her. His heart was aching for a sight of her face.

He arrived at Bellaggio the next afternoon. His spirits rose when the little steam-boat pushed out from Como. The lake lay like a huge opal in its setting of glorious hills. He had never seen anything more beautiful. The colours ranged from the rusty gold of autumn to the pink and white of spring blossoms : from the tender green of the thorn and chestnut trees to the sombre lines of the rock-pines. Yet he was impatient of every delay. Surely never steam-boat moved so slowly. He was among the first to land at Bellaggio, and rushed off at once to the Hotel Grande Bretagne.

But disappointment still dogged his steps. The Bolithos were not there. The girl in the office smiled sweetly at the handsome Englishman.

“No, but they will surely come,” she assured him. There were letters waiting for them. One letter arrived by the first post that morning. Monsieur would wait?

There was nothing else to be done, so he secured a room on the first floor overlooking the lake, had a bath and changed into a fresh suit of clothes.

He watched the last boat come in and then turned away sick at heart. He began to fear that the Bolithos had given Bellaggio the go-by, and had made straight for Lucerne. When they left Monte Carlo they had evidently turned their faces towards home. He fancied that Monte Carlo with its hectic life—its froth and passion and extravagance—did not suit the stern old colonel. Moreover, a sudden burst of summer weather had made it unbearably hot. But what had become of them? Had any of them fallen sick by the way, or had there been an accident?

Anxiety was now added to his disappointment. The following day he watched the passengers land from every boat that came in, making short excursions between-whiles in the immediate neighbourhood.

That night he scarcely slept at all. Their non-appearance he feared was an omen of a still greater disappointment that awaited him. He had come on a fool's errand. Why should she care? She was little more than a girl and quite inexperienced. What could she know of love? He had better pack up in the morning and make tracks for England. He had told his mother that he was taking a holiday. How she would smile if she knew!

When morning came hope stirred in his heart again. He would wait another day. The weather was perfect, the scenery beautiful beyond description. But for the suspense and anxiety that were gnawing at his heart, how he would enjoy it all!

Through his field-glasses he watched from his bedroom window the first boat come in. Of course she was not among the passengers. It was foolish to expect her. It was possible that by some off-chance she had heard that he was seeking her and so was keeping out of his way. To-morrow he would cross over to Lugano and pick up

the St. Gothard express and make straight for Paris and home ; it was useless waiting any longer.

After lunch he went for a walk. He wore a light tweed suit and a panama hat, the brim of which he turned down to shield his eyes from the sun. His field-glasses were slung across his shoulder. As the afternoon wore on he espied the Como boat nosing her way up the lake. Should he go down and see the passengers land ? He had been disappointed so often that he shrank from adding another disappointment to the list. He called to mind the old saying that a watched kettle never boils. He had watched since his arrival every boat that came in ; perhaps if he gave up watching she might arrive.

The desire, however, to see for himself proved too strong to be resisted. He turned and began to retrace his steps. A crowd of natives as usual had gathered round the little landing-stage. He stood outside and raised his field-glasses as the boat drew near.

Suddenly his heart seemed to miss a beat and he almost cried out, "There she is !" He would know her amongst a thousand. There was no woman like her in the world. There she stood, trim, dainty, with flushed cheeks and lips apart showing her white teeth. His heart thumped against his ribs like a sledge-hammer.

He stood behind the crowd and watched the passengers land. He recognised the Colonel from the description that had been given of him—his bushy eyebrows and fierce moustache. His ladies followed, but Basil had no eyes for anyone but Phyllis. How well she looked—how light her step—how bright her eyes !

They walked up to the hotel with a dozen others. Basil kept well in the rear. He did not enter the hotel for some considerable time. When he did so the hall was empty.

"Your friends have arrived," the young lady in the office smiled at him.

"That's good. Don't tell them that I am here. I will see them to-morrow. You understand?"

She nodded and smiled again.

"I want to meet her first alone," he reflected; "not with a crowd of people looking on. Perhaps I may get an opportunity this evening—if not, then to-morrow."

Though his fate was still hanging in the balance he felt wonderfully lighthearted. He had seen her, and she was more alluring than ever. Her grace and charm intoxicated him and sent the blood coursing through his veins like sparkling wine.

He did not dress for dinner that night, neither did he venture into the dining-room, he contented himself with what his mother would call a snack in the restaurant.

He was sitting in the lounge behind a newspaper when the Bolitho party came down to dinner. Phyllis and Judy stood quite near him for a few moments, but he had no eyes for Judy. Phyllis's bare arms and white neck and shoulders dazzled him. He had never seen her in evening-dress before. She looked taller, more womanly and mature. The last six or seven months had left their mark on her. She seemed to have lost something of her girlishness. Her voice had in it a note of gravity that he had never noticed in the old days. Also there was a slight look of weariness in her eyes.

They passed on into the dining-room and he breathed freely again. He had been almost afraid that they would hear the beating of his heart.

He had no opportunity of seeing her alone that night. They sat for a while in the lounge after dinner and the Colonel smoked with evident relish an enormous cigar. From a distant corner in the shadow of a screen he

watched with hungry eyes the face of the woman he loved. She talked freely to her companions and seemed interested in her surroundings but she did not often smile. He wondered if she was entirely happy.

The next day his opportunity came.

CHAPTER XXVI

ANSWERED

BASIL had his continental breakfast of coffee and rolls in his own room, after which he went on to the little balcony outside his window and waited. From where he sat he could see to right and left, as well as in front. The lake lay still as a pool, clouded for the most part, but with shining patches here and there. The little village was fully astir and gay with colour. The wind stirred. The day promised to be hot and sultry.

At the foot of the hotel grounds, close to the lake, was an arbour with a footpath, which hugged the shore, running in front of it. Basil had used it more than once when he wanted to be alone.

As the minutes passed his impatience increased. His nerves thrilled like harp-strings. He still hoped that he would have the opportunity of meeting Phyllis alone. Every few moments he glanced at his watch. It was still comparatively early, and few of the hotel guests were yet stirring. Those who arrived the previous evening were doubtless tired and would be in no hurry to get up. It was foolish to get impatient. It was not likely Phyllis would be stirring yet. She would be in need of a long morning's rest after her journey of the previous day.

It was not easy, however, to be patient. He had waited so long, had travelled so far to see her, had been

disappointed so many times, had fought so hard a battle with his doubts and misgivings——

What would her answer be ?

He sprang to his feet and pulled his panama over his eyes, his heart fluttered like a frightened bird. He could not see her face for her back was toward him, but he recognised her slim figure, her easy, swinging walk, her shapely ungloved hand in which she carried a letter.

She was making straight for the harbour and she was alone. He waited until she had comfortably settled herself, then he ran lightly downstairs and out of the house. He made a wide detour, and then struck the path not far from the little landing-stage. He came upon her as she was putting the letter back into the envelope. She did not seem conscious of his approach—possibly she had not heard his footfalls. Then she looked up and their eyes met. In a moment she was on her feet, a rich colour flooding her cheeks.

“ You ? ” she gasped, and the colour ebbed from her face as quickly as it had risen.

“ Are you sorry to see me ? ” he questioned, smiling into her troubled eyes.

“ Sorry ? Oh no. But—but——”

“ May I sit with you for a few minutes ? ”

“ Would you ? ”

His heart leaped at the question.

“ I should like to very much, if you will let me. I have come a long distance to see you.”

“ To see me ? ” and she sat down slowly, keeping her eyes fixed on his face. She had not offered to shake hands, neither had he. Each seemed a little in doubt of the other.

“ I have been waiting for you since Wednesday,” he said, seating himself a little distance away.

"Then—then—you are not very—very angry with me?" she questioned, bringing out the words with an effort.

"I was afraid you might be angry with me," he parried, and one of his rare crooked smiles played round the corners of his mouth.

She seemed to consider that for a moment or two while the colour ebbed and flowed on her cheeks. Her heart was beating so fast that she could scarcely breathe. Her words came haltingly and with difficulty.

"Oh, it was all a horrible—horrible mistake," she said, dropping her eyes to the ground. "I had been lied to; wickedly—cruelly deceived——"

"Yes, I know," he interrupted. "I have heard all the story——"

"You have heard? You know——?"

He nodded.

"I was fortunate enough to meet your friend, Miss Drew, a week or two ago, and she took it upon herself to explain what she felt was due to me."

"Rachel did that? How splendid of her!" and she lifted a pair of shining eyes to his.

"That is the reason I am here," he went on quietly. "As soon as I could get away I followed you to Cannes—thence to Monte Carlo. There I was held up for four days on this silly passport business. Then I came on here. I was told your letters were to be forwarded to this place. Yesterday I concluded you were going to give Bellaggio a miss. If you had not arrived last evening I should have started this morning for home."

"Oh!"

"You see, I had begun to imagine all sorts of things. I thought perhaps that you had heard I was following you and so decided to avoid me."

“ But why should I ? ”

“ Oh, I don't know. You see, I was getting pretty desperate. Our last meeting was——”

“ But you know now the reason of that,” she interrupted quickly.

“ Yes, I know, and I do not wonder at it. You must have thought me a pretty blackguard. I am amazed that you were as gentle with me as you were. Still, all that apart, I had no means of knowing what you really thought of me. I don't know yet, so I came to find out. I have been chasing you half over Europe with that object in view——”

“ And you don't know what I think of you ? ” she did not raise her eyes lest he should see the light of love and happiness shining in them. She did not want him to know just yet that this was the most glorious moment of her life. She wanted to hear what further he had to say, for his every word was like music in her ears.

“ No, I don't,” he said doggedly. “ I know what I think of you.”

“ Yes ? ” she queried in a whisper.

“ I think you are the dearest woman that ever lived, and I love you—love you. From our first meeting, I have loved you. You fill my world, and I want you as I want nothing else on earth——”

At that she raised her lovely eyes to his : “ And don't you realise, dear,” she whispered, “ how I want you ? ”

“ Want me ? ”

“ Oh, Basil, my heart has ached for you every moment since we parted.”

“ You darling,” and in a moment his lips had found hers.

A little later, with an arm about her, he was wiping

away her tears. "Oh, Basil, I can't help it," she smiled, and pressed closer to him. "To think that after all these months we should have found each other, and all misunderstandings cleared away. Surely I am not dreaming?"

He kissed her again. Kissed her hair, and eyes, and cheeks, and lips.

"Oh, Basil, you make me very proud," she whispered, "and very, very humble. Are you sure that you love me as much as you say?"

"As much as I say?" he laughed. "Oh, you blessed damosel, I haven't come within a thousand miles of saying it."

"And you will protect me and keep me safe?"

"Won't I just?"

"Oh, I have lived in such terror, dear. That dreadful man has nearly trapped me twice, and I have gone in fear of my life that the third time——"

"There will be no third time, sweetheart," he laughed. "Tresize will not trouble anyone again."

"You mean——?"

He nodded. "You have not seen the latest English papers?"

"No."

"There is no longer any doubt. His yacht went down off the Scillies. The late gales evidently broke her up, and the wreckage has been washed ashore. Lots of the stuff has been identified."

She did not speak again for a considerable time. Then she looked up into his face with misty eyes.

"Dearest," she said, "I shouldn't be afraid any more even if he were alive."

"No?"

"How could I be now that I have you? Oh, Basil

beloved, you have changed my world and changed my life. When I came out this morning to read Rachel's letter, I felt as if I never wanted to go back to Pendare again. I was well in health. All my strength had come back to me. And yet I was like one wandering in a dark forest. I could see no way anywhere. I was hemmed in by the thicket on every side. And now! Oh, dear one, I am right out in the sunshine again. The forest is all behind me, and in front I see the way leading on and on, and the light of the sun full upon it."

"You wonderful girl."

"No, dear, I'm not a bit wonderful, but I'm a happy girl. I really don't know myself. It's like jumping suddenly from winter into summer. Until you came a few minutes ago it was as though I had a big load on my shoulders, or a stone in my heart. I kept trying every day to throw off the load and I couldn't. Now it's all gone. The magic of your love has melted the stone. Oh, I'm as light as a feather. I'm just a new girl. I want to laugh and dance and sing. Don't think me foolish, dear, but you can't imagine what it means—how amazingly light and happy I feel."

"I wish I had found you sooner," he said tenderly, tightening his arm about her waist.

"Oh, I wish you had. I should have enjoyed things then. Now I want to go back again to Florence and Venice and see those wonderful cities with new eyes and a fresh understanding . . ."

"We will go together some day," he smiled.

"Oh yes. Won't that be lovely! Just you and I. Now we must go back to the hotel and I will introduce you to the Bolithos—they are such dears. They know all about you, of course. That is the penalty of being famous. Oh, I am tremendously proud."

“Then you must curb your pride at once, for I have not begun to be famous yet,” he laughed.

“As if I didn’t know,” she smiled at him and raised her lips again to be kissed.

They had so much to talk about that it was nearly lunch-time when they got back to the hotel, and the Bolithos were wondering what had become of their charge.

That evening they all dined at the same table. Phyllis, arrayed in her most becoming gown, was bubbling over with happiness, though she tried her best to hide the fact. The Colonel’s shrewd eyes, however, were quick to notice some subtle change in her. The tired note had gone out of her voice and the look of strain had left her eyes. She was gay without effort and there was a joyous ring in her laughter that had been absent for months past.

“Phyl, my girl,” he said, as they neared the end of the dinner, “you look heaps better to-night.”

“I feel better,” she laughed.

“I expect Dr. Tresillian has been prescribing some fresh medicine for her,” Judy said bluntly, with more truth than she knew.

“You have heard the story of the boy who whistled to keep his courage up?” Tressilian queried.

“But what has that do do with Phyllis?” Mrs. Bolitho inquired seriously.

“Well, this morning, she promised to be my wife,” he smiled; “so she has to make a show of being cheerful about it.”

For a moment there was dead silence. Then Judy went off into a fit of laughter. “Oh, my sainted aunt!” she gasped.

"By Jove, that's a facer," chuckled the Colonel.

"Well, really, Phyllis," was all Mrs. Bolitho could say.

Blushing like a peony, Phyllis looked from one to the other and said nothing.

"It's all my fault," interposed Basil, with a gay laugh, "I came here on purpose to propose to her."

"And she capitulated, eh?" the Colonel chuckled.

"Good. Let me congratulate you both. Now we will drink healths all round."

It was the middle of April when Phyllis found herself again at Pendare—a glorified Pendare, it seemed to her. Never had the woods looked so beautiful, nor the lawns so smooth and green. Never had the flowers been so rich in colour. Never had the leat rippled so pleasantly in the glen. Never had the trees whispered to each other so entrancingly.

Of course, the news of her engagement had been trumpeted all over St. Runton long before her arrival, and everybody was speculating as to when the marriage would take place, and wondering what changes that would mean at Pendare.

It was late in the evening when Phyllis arrived. Turk nearly went off his head with delight. Betty hugged her darling until she had no breath left. 'Lijah walked about the house as though he trod on air. Kitty—who was returning to her home and to school next day—gazed with admiring eyes. Rachel smiled knowingly. She had her own happy secret which she had not yet confided to her friend.

Long after the others had gone to bed and the house had grown still, the two girls sat together and talked. Time passed unheeded. Each blessed the other. "If I had not come here to keep you company I should never have met Peter," Rachel confided.

"And if you had not introduced yourself to Basil and taken him into your confidence he would never have come in search of me," Phyllis countered, and then they laughed together and decided that they were the happiest girls in England.

Directly after breakfast Basil drove up in his car. Phyllis was eagerly expecting him. They had not seen each other for nearly three weeks, and each was hungering for a sight of the other's face.

Basil's patients suffered neglect that day, but as he had no serious case on hand he did not worry. They spent most of the morning out-of-doors wandering arm-in-arm through the grounds, and when he departed after lunch he had not said half the things that he had meant to say.

Soon after his departure guests began to arrive to pay their respects and offer congratulations. Mr. Weekes, however, did not appear. He had no further use for Pendare or its inmates. A month later it was rumoured that Miss Deersly had annexed him. To a young woman who shouldered so many responsibilities and ran the parish with such a light heart an extra responsibility did not matter in the least. No one doubted but that she would manage the curate with as much efficiency as she managed the choir or the Sunday school, or any of the other organisations to which she devoted her life.

Early in May—after giving Phyllis her blessing—Mrs. Tresillian passed quietly out of life.

"Don't delay your marriage, Basil, on my account," she said to him the day before her death. "You will be lonely when I am gone. Phyllis is a dear girl and will make you happy. Now that she has consented, I am content to go."

The marriage, however, did not take place till the first week in September. The question of residence proved

to be a tougher problem than either had anticipated. They argued it out, and grew excited and kissed each other and argued again.

"You love Pendare?" she questioned.

"I adore it. There isn't a lovelier spot in Cornwall. But people will say I am marrying you for your money."

"Well, since we know you are not, why should that trouble you?"

"I don't want to give the impression that I am sponging on my wife."

"Then I will have to take you in as a paying guest," she laughed.

"Also I have my laboratory at Redstone," he argued.

"Then we will build a new and better one here, and I will learn how to hunt microbes with you."

"But what will people think?"

"Who cares what they think? Besides, I have told everybody that you have tons of money of your own and don't want mine."

"But you don't know how much money I have."

"And, belovedest, I don't care. So long as I have you—so long as we have each other—nothing else matters."

"Then you would be content to live with me at Redstone?"

"Dearest, if there was nothing else to be had I would be content to live with you in a wooden shack; but since Pendare is here, and only needs a man to make it complete——"

"So you think it needs a man?" he laughed.

"Sure of it. Ask Rachel. We've neither of us any false pride on the matter. I shed mine long ago. It isn't good for woman to be alone, so why not admit it."

"I don't want you ever to be alone again," he said, kissing her on the eyes and lips.

But, being a proud man, he returned to the subject again and yet again.

In the end, however—after the fashion of Abraham Lincoln—he compromised ; that is, he allowed Phyllis to have her own way.

He never regretted it. Fame came to him at Pendare and great happiness.

If you call about tea-time on a summer afternoon you may find them sitting together in the shade of the copper beech : the light of a great love shining in their eyes, and the first of a new generation sprawling happily at their feet ; while a little distance away Turk keeps solemn watch and ward.

THE END



